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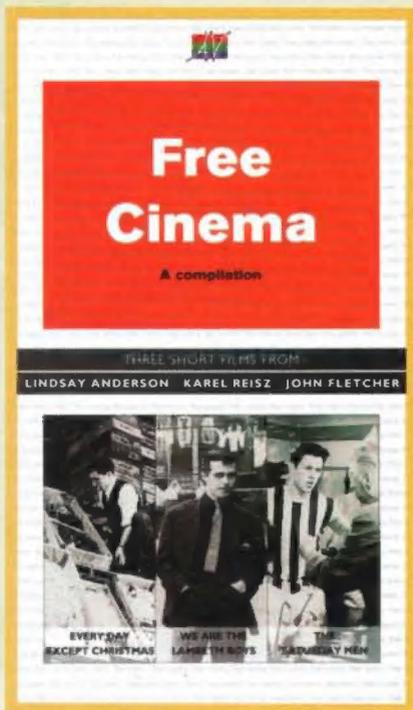
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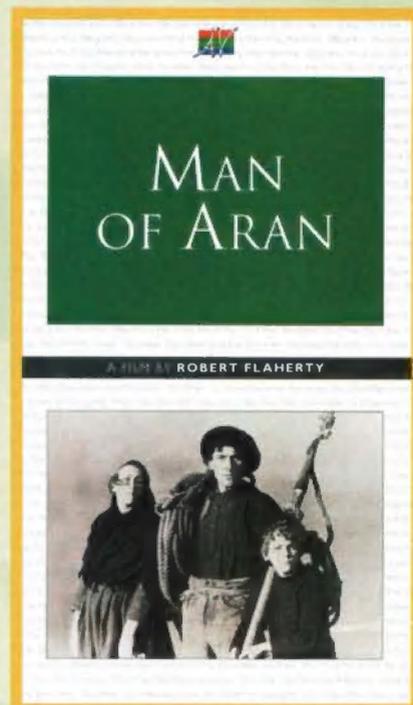
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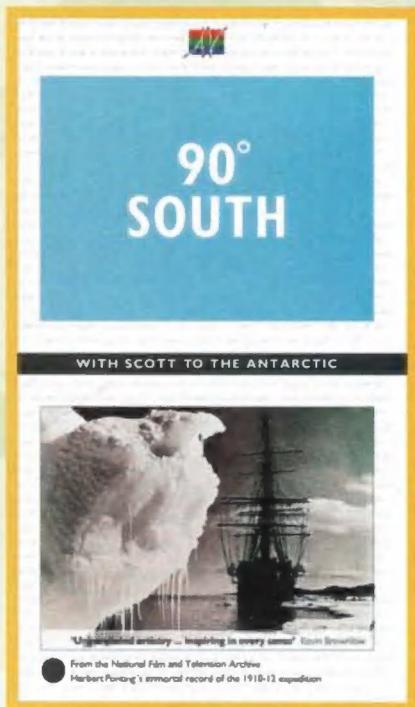


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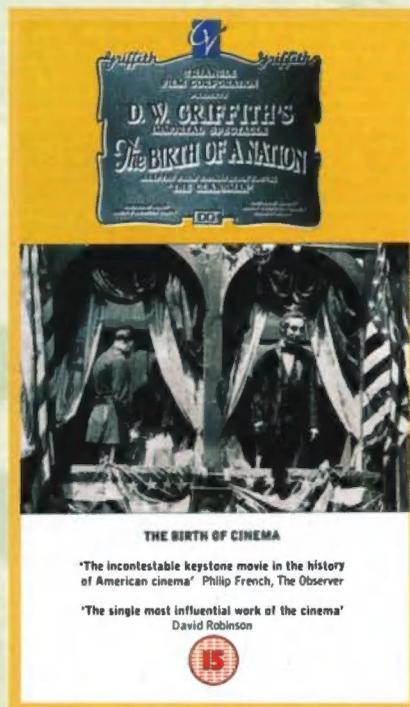


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Assistant
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Managing director
BFI publishing
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May 1994



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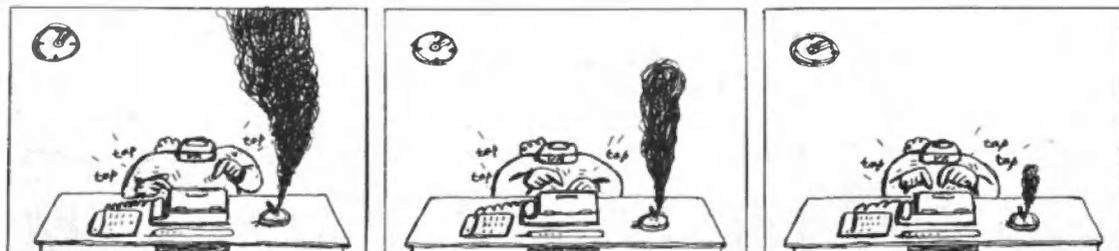
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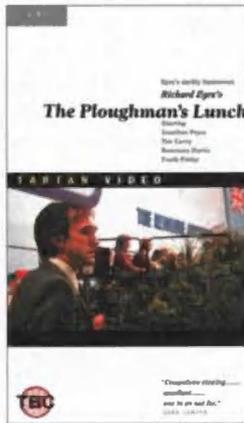
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MAY 94

VIDEO

The Sensible Party

Contributors to this issue

Manohla Dargis is a film critic based in Los Angeles

Leslie Felperin Sharman teaches at Goldsmiths College, London and specialises in animation

Barbara Einhorn is a specialist in Eastern European affairs

Angus Finney is a freelance writer whose recent book is *A Dose of Reality: The State of European Cinema*

Jill Forbes has written numerous studies of French cinema and soon will take up the post of Professor of French at the University of Bristol

Julian Graffy is senior lecturer, SSEES, University of London

J. Hoberman's books include *Vulgar Modernism*. He is working on a study of post-war US cinema

Philip Kemp is working on a biography of Michael Balcon

Andy Medhurst teaches film and media at the University of Sussex and has written widely on British cinema

Tony Rayns has written extensively on many aspects of cinema. He will be one of the speakers at the forthcoming ICA event to commemorate Derek Jarman

Keith Reader teaches French at the University of London

Nick Roddick has written several studies of the Hollywood film industry

Peter Wollen is a film-maker, curator and critic whose most recent book is a collection of essays, *Raiding the Icebox*

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"I am pleased that we now have the basis of a sensible way forward." So said Shadow Home Secretary Tony Blair when David Alton withdrew his amendment on video censorship to the Criminal Justice Bill. The withdrawal was on the basis of undertakings given by Home Secretary Michael Howard (and apparently brokered by Blair) to introduce his own amendment on the subject when the Bill passes through the House of Lords later this spring. Blair's view has been echoed by James Ferman, director of the BBFC and previously a vocal critic of the amendment.

Alton's parliamentary success has been a victory for those who have a considerably wider agenda on the media than simply preventing a small number of videos from falling into the hands of young children. (The hit list of 'video nasties' published by the most vociferous of Alton's allies, the *Daily Mirror*, includes *The Silence of the Lambs*.) Last year the MP tabled an early-day motion calling for a Royal Commission to look into the effects on the community of levels of violence on both television and video. He still wants that. He has also favourably cited a report made last year to the House of Lords Broadcasting Group by Professors Andrew Sims and Peter Gray. One of the five conclusions of this report was that "there should be more attention paid to positive aspects of viewing and healthy habits of viewing. In particular, family patterns of viewing should be encouraged." In short, in defence of 'the family', the campaign is likely now to turn its attention to television. After all, if *Child's Play 3* is "corrupting", how much more must be the thrice-weekly pre-watershed BBC *EastEnders*, a recent episode of which featured a shooting, an attempted rape and an apparent suicide?

With such important matters at stake, it is imperative that serious debate is encouraged. But if the response to the paper on 'Video Violence and the Protection of Children' by Professor Elizabeth Newson, commissioned by Alton and signed by 25 psychologists and paediatricians, is anything to go by, debate is the last thing on anyone's mind. "At last, experts admit: Movie nasties DO kill" proclaimed the *Mirror* along with most of the rest of the national press. Swansea East MP Donald Anderson described the paper in the Commons debate as "that brave *volte face* on the part of so many distinguished scientists."

When journalists and academics got round to reading the Newson paper, they found something different. The paper contained no new evidence. It was high on moral outrage and thin on argument. It leapt from discussing the James Bulger case to asking, "What, then can be seen as the 'different' factor that has entered the lives of countless children and adolescents in recent years? That has to be recognised as the easy availability to children of gross images of violence on video." But where is Newson's evidence that such crimes have increased so as even to need a "'different' factor"? And if they have, why does that different factor "have" to be video violence?

Newson's paper was not only unconvincing in itself, it was also not an experts' *volte face*. Neither Newson

nor most of her signatories were in any way 'experts' on the effects of media. Those experts have by and large remained highly critical of her approach. Nor have most of Newson's signatories made any public pronouncements on the subject in the past. So we have no evidence that they ever believed anything other than what they now believe.

Two of the signatories have, however, publicly pronounced on the issue before – the already mentioned Professors Sims and Gray. Both were members of the Academic Working Party, described by its chairman, Lord Nugent, as the "informal group of parliamentarians and churchmen which came together in 1983 with the common wish to take action to protect children against injury from violent and obscene video-tapes, which appeared to be circulating widely." In 1985 Sims wrote that "the video containing combinations of violence and sex is a potential mental and moral health hazard of a kind we have not experienced before." Hardly a case of *volte face* here. But the press propagated the story, and the Labour Party, amongst others, bought it.

Such a climate bodes ill for what will happen when Michael Howard does produce his amendment. The details, all the parties involved have been quick to maintain, remain to be worked out. But the framework within which that is to be done is clear. Alton's two criteria – "presents an inappropriate model for children" and "likely to cause psychological harm to a child" – will be embodied in statute as considerations to be taken into account by the BBFC. These considerations will be more than optional. "The presence of the statutory criteria will reinforce the more rigorous approach by the board which it has agreed to take," said Howard. He continued, "the criteria will also make it easier for the decisions of the board to be made the subject of judicial review." While the view at the moment seems to be that the amendment will not refer to already certificated videos, it will certainly be easier to exert informal pressure on distributors to 'voluntarily' withdraw unacceptable titles (let's say, *Nightmare on Elm Street*) – and there is little doubt that the amendment will lead to the courts being used to challenge the BBFC's decisions. At one level this may not be a bad state of affairs, since the BBFC has been a characteristically British invention, accountable apparently to no one.

But before we come to that point, those of us opposed to Alton have a problem. After we have identified the intellectual shoddiness of Alton's argument and its ideological ambitions, we are left with the uncomfortable fact that unravelling our opponents' arguments is not enough. The power of Alton is that he has managed to make his case the 'common sense' of the moment. What can we do to make our case a counter-common sense – one which carries parents and children with us, understands their real and serious anxieties, offers counter and convincing explanations for what is perceived as violence, and yet does not lapse back into traditional solutions? It's a hard task, but one that needs doing.

The business



Odds and evens: Nanni Moretti's 'Caro diario', in competition this year at Cannes. Will it scoop the Palme d'Or?

● Print deadlines are bad news. As I write this (in early April), the one thing any film journalist worth his or her salt is focusing on is finding out the Cannes line-up before anyone else does. We all have our Parisian deep throats, who will whisper to us what Gilles (Jacob, the festival's General Delegate) has liked/walked out of/not bothered to see, or what has especially excited/bored/enraged Pierre-Henri (Deleau, head of the Directors' Fortnight). It's a chancy business, since most deep throats have personal agendas, and can sprinkle their lists of likely choices with red herrings or elements of wishful thinking. What is more, being French, they never know the titles of the films, referring to them only as "le nouveau Jarmusch" or "un merveilleux film indien".

By the time this magazine is printed, of course, the deep throats will all be out of business for another year and the festival will almost have started. None the less, Mr Busy is prepared to risk one prediction and say that the hot favourite for the Palme d'Or this year is likely to be Nanni Moretti's *Caro diario* (*Dear Diary*), a personal testament by an Italian director whose star has never quite risen internationally. Snapped up for world sales by Carole Myer of London's The Sales Company on an awayday to Rome just before Christmas, *Caro*

diario has already been bought for US distribution by Ira Deutchman of Fine Line, the art-film subsidiary of mini-major New Line Cinema.

If Moretti's film does win the Palme d'Or, it will be ironic, since Italian cinema has probably not seen a worse year than 1994 in two decades. Its two chief sources of production funds – state television channel RAI and private broadcaster Fininvest (Silvio Berlusconi's base) – have more or less dried up, the former because of its ever-more-chronic financial situation, the latter following the break-up of the Penta empire late last year.

The fact that *Caro diario* is represented by a non-Italian sales company is highly significant. Myer has been one of the most consistently successful sellers at Cannes for over a decade, having started off with the BFI and moved on to Film Four before setting up The Sales Company – originally as an outlet for Zenith, Working Title and Palace movies – in the mid-80s.

Italian sales companies in Cannes, by contrast, either operate at the bottom end of the market, with action, soft porn and horror, or else in a vacuum like the quasi-governmental agency SACIS, whose approach to selling has all the panache of an Aeroflot marketing campaign. Perhaps for this reason, the most successful

Italian film export of the past five years is almost certainly not (no one publishes figures, so there is no way of being certain) *Cinema Paradiso* or *Mediterraneo*, but an animated children's film called *Lucky Luke*.

The latest bid to revitalise the Italian art film, meanwhile, is being made by the veteran Francesco Rosi, 73, who will follow an adaptation of Primo Levi's novel 'La tregua', starring John Turturro, with one of the things he has always done best: a panorama (as yet untitled) of life in Italy over the past 30 years. Rosi has said he would like the film to star either Jeremy Irons or Richard Gere, which indicates that the title isn't the only thing he hasn't quite settled on.

● Much feted in Berlin last February where she was vice-president of the jury, Hong Kong actress-turned-producer Hsu Feng told anyone who was prepared to listen – and with a press organisation like hers, that meant nearly every journalist in the place – that it was her dream to play Madame Mao. No surprise, then, when the announcement came a couple of weeks later that Chen Kaige – whose *Farewell My Concubine* Hsu Feng produced for her immensely wealthy Tomson Films – was indeed planning a biopic of the Old Swimmer's all-powerful right-hand woman.

But either Chen hadn't seen the Berlin clippings, or else he likes to live dangerously. His choice for the role

of Madame Mao – always assuming that anyone in China will let him within a million shining years of the project – turns out to be Gong Li.

Anyone with a smattering of any Nordic language who happened to pass through the Scandinavian Film area in the Berlin Market this year will have gathered that relations between the five countries who make up the banner (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden) are as volatile as ever.

Last year everyone was blaming the Norwegians for cocking up the screening schedules. This year everyone was blaming the Finns for wanting more advertising space. Scandinavian Films, they pointed out, is an egalitarian organisation and everyone gets the same wall space regardless of how many features they have in the official selections (this year, it was Norway 0, Denmark 1, Iceland 1, Sweden 1, Finland 4).

It now seems that Kirsi Tykkyläinen of the Finnish Film Foundation is so angry about the whole business that she has yanked the FFF out of Scandinavian Films and will set up shop separately at Cannes. Tykkyläinen – who is a fluent Russian speaker and stars in Aki Kaurismäki's new film 'Pidä huivista kiinni, Tatjana' ('Take Care of Your Scarf, Tatjana'), a near-certainty for the Cannes Directors' Fortnight – has revealed a particularly Finnish aptitude for lateral thinking in her choice of location for the FFF's Riviera base.

While other companies pay through the nose for a broom-cupboard in the Majestic

or a seventh-floor back in the Carlton, Tykkyläinen has organised an amply proportioned free spot with terrace in a bar called Le Petit Carlton, noted watering hole of the world's press, where closing time coincides with the opening time of most of the neighbouring shops. Mr Busy was not privy to the discussions between Kirsi and Le Petit Carlton's owner, but since the latter's business nose tends to be of the hard variety, he assumes that the promised presence in Cannes of Maurismäki's notoriously bibulous rock band Leningrad Cowboys may have had something to do with it.

● Enough of such European frivolity: let's get down to some basics of the

Seventh Art. Figures released by the Motion Picture Association of America's lovable Jack Valenti at an annual promotional exercise called Showest held in Las Vegas last month reveal that the price of making a Hollywood movie has gone up by 3.7 per cent since last year.

The average negative cost per picture now stands at \$29.9 million. Add in the average marketing cost of \$14 million (up 6 per cent from last year and helped, I suspect, by all the money spent on trying to get people to see *Last Action Hero*) and you have a figure not far short of \$45 million.

What's the going price for a hospital or Third World aid programme these days? Anybody know?

Long, long ago Mr Busy was ushered into a very large office just off Golden Square occupied by Sir Denis Forman. Sir Denis was, at the time, launching something called Granada Films. Nothing ever came of it. But not long after, in another corner of the same empire, Steve Morrison was busy using some of Granada Television's money to back films such as 'My Left Foot' and 'The Field'. Then along came the TV franchise auction, followed closely by the euphemistically titled "restructuring" of Granada into a form more befitting the operator of the nation's

motorway service stations, and Granada Films went quiet again.

Good to see, then, that the company is back in business, under long-time Granada executive Pippa Cross, with a feature entitled 'Jack and Sarah', which is now in post-production after a January/February shoot. Starring Richard E. Grant and Samantha Mathis, it is the story of a recently widowed father left to bring up a baby (the Sarah of the title) on his own. The director (and writer) is Tim Sullivan, who co-wrote 'A Handful of Dust' and directed 'Thatcher: The Final Days' for television.

● I've grown so bored with news about features based on television series that I can't remember whether or not I've told you, but they're doing a big-budget version of *Sgt. Bilko*. The one good piece of news about the whole thing is that Bilko will be played by Steve Martin.

Hollywood's love affair with Mexican cinema continues, the latest object of affection being 28-year-old director Guillermo Del Toro, whose sci-fi movie 'Cronos' has had some successful festival outings recently, notably at San Sebastian 1993 and Sundance 1994. Del Toro has now been hired by Universal to direct 'Spanky', based on a story about a yuppie Faust written by British horror novelist Christopher Fowler.

Not so lucky has been Mexican-American Robert Rodriguez, whose phenomenally successful ultra-low-budget 'El Mariachi' appeared to be the prelude to a bigger-budget career at Fox. After much enthusiastic heralding of this progressive move, Rodriguez's first post-'Mariachi' "movie" was announced recently: he is to direct a segment of the 'Drive-In Classics' series for cable network Showtime.

● Finally, it has been a (relatively) long time since Mr Busy has been able to give column inches to that amply proportioned giant of the motion-picture business Menahem Golan. With his post-Cannon empire, 21st Century Film Corporation, now down the can, Golan has settled on a new banner of suitably epic proportions (International Dynamic Pictures) and has been wandering the world in search of projects worthy of his attention.

It has always been Golan's style to announce a film as a reality in the hope that it will become so, and I suppose it is in this context that we should view *The Golem of Prague*, a television series based on *Les Liaisons dangereuses* to be shot in St Petersburg; and a film set in the red-light district of Amsterdam to be co-produced with something called "Netherlands Film Institute Productions". One film, however, does definitely appear to be happening. It started shooting in the Philippines on 28 March. It stars someone called Kely McClung. And it is called *Stickman*.

Very International. Very Dynamic. Very Menahem Golan.

ISTANBUL NOTES

Bresson in Turkey

Four Turkish films made it into Turkey's top 50 for 1993. It's enough to make you want to cry "GATTI", and indeed Turkey supported France during the tortured negotiations over audio-visual quotas, which ended up proving not very much - at least not for Turkey. But despite a convert's zeal for the European Union (which the Turkish film industry is pressing the government to join as quickly as possible), and guest privileges at Eurimages, the EU's production fund, Turkish film-makers still have to grapple with a fundamental problem: they are making too many turkeys.

The latest films from Yesilcam, Turkey's Hollywood, are unveiled at the Istanbul International Film Festival (2-17 April). The Turkish Cinema section contains the best - and worst - of this year's Turkish films; critics will note, however, that only one, German resident Erden Kiral's German/Turkish co-production *The Blue Exile*, already a festival veteran of Montreal in 1993 and Berlin in 1994, merits a place in International Competition. The rest are the victims of bad scriptwriting, poor promotion and inadequate post-production.

Yesilcam is a vacuum - in terms of both films and leadership. In its formative years Turkish cinema was structurally repetitive, with little depth or character analysis. Films evoked the rural, peasant existence of most Turkish people. By the 60s, film-makers such as Metin Erksan and Atif Yilmaz had begun to experiment with naturalism, "carrying film-making into the streets from the sets". There followed a period of social realism, still discernible in Turkish films today - for instance, Yilmaz's latest, *The Night, the Angel and Our Folks*, a hand-held record of the street life of Beyoglu, Istanbul's Soho.

By the late 70s there had been a huge influx of people to the cities (the population of Istanbul has

swelled from 500,000 in 1950 to 12 million today). But political violence, economic crises and the rise of television and video began to kill off the middle-class cinema-going audience. At first, the film industry retreated into low-budget comedies and pornography. But since the late 80s, political stability has set in, and the main audience for cinema has become young people, students and intellectuals. Films, correspondingly, tend to be more self-absorbed.

Many families can no longer afford to go to the cinema. Anyway, with 100 films shown every week on one of Turkey's 12 television channels, why bother? Earlier this year, the Hurrayet newspaper group, owner of the hugely successful general entertainment station Show TV, mischievously launched Cine5, Turkey's first pay-movie channel. A deposit of \$75 and a monthly subscription of \$10 guarantees you four Turkish films per month, in an unrelenting diet of everything from *RoboCop* to *Rain Man*.

These developments have confused Turkish film-makers. As competition is intense, television pays relatively good prices for their films, and it has proved a valuable source of financing. But their films tend to do badly at the

box office, and most don't even make it into a cinema: of the 82 Turkish films released last year, only 11 had a theatrical run.

Part of the problem is distribution. American majors now control 50 per cent of the Turkish market; with 108 film releases last year, to second-place Italy's 16, Hollywood hasn't much to worry about. Serif Gören's gangster movie *Amerikali*, independently distributed, notched up 354,656 admissions for sixth place in the Turkish top 50. And Sinan Cetin's *Berlin in Berlin*, financed by the director with no contribution from the Ministry of Culture, remarkably broke even on its Turkish run, with 235,000 admissions.

But these are the exceptions which prove the rule. Cetin argues that if Turkish films are to prove bigger draws at home, and sell at all abroad, they need to feature international stars. Technical standards must be improved (*Berlin in Berlin* was post-produced in Budapest), and budgets should be higher. He chides Turkey's film schools for teaching Brecht and Bresson as opposed to his own mentors, Scorsese and (Ridley) Scott, and adds, half-seriously, that film-makers should also consider shooting in English. *Benedict Carver*

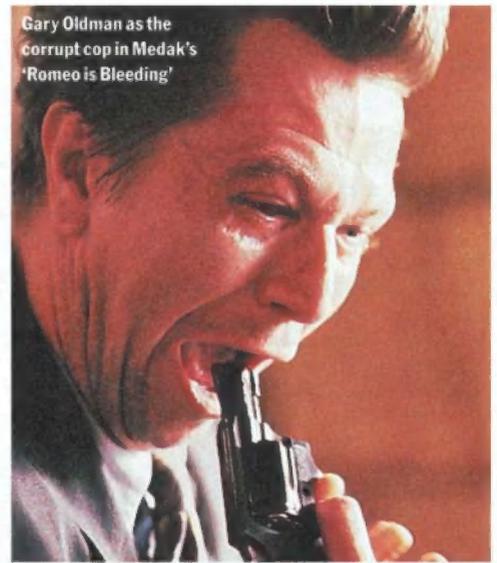


● Bone-shattering, skin-splitting, blood-spurting, Quentin Tarantino's cinema of viscera is written on the flesh of outlaw men and women. In his latest movie *Pulp Fiction*, he returns to a world of casual violence and blunt sentiment, one fuelled by a hardboiled past and fired by a pop-happy present. In this world where the coffee's always black and the cigarettes are surely unfiltered, the divide between the normal and the pathological isn't just blurred, it's obsolete.

Tarantino is the new point man on pulp, but he isn't the only director twisting hardboiled style into contemporary paradigms. Directors as dissimilar as Carl Franklin (*One False Move*), Tamra Davis (*Gun Crazy*) and Peter Medak (*Romeo is Bleeding*) are limning similar terrain, seduced by an aesthetic whose allure is obvious, if not always simple. Pulp is lurid, wild, sensational, cheap. Located in mean and naked streets,

trailer parks, coughs of dust off lonely ribbons of asphalt, pulp movies are non-suburban and aggressively anti-80s. Their meat is murder and all manner of mental, emotional and physical rot – a poverty-row vision at far remove from the steadicam, no-grain gloss of Spielberg, Luças and their technologies of opulence.

The term 'pulp' comes from magazines that surfaced around the turn of the century, deposed the dime novel, and endured through the Second World War. Although the name originates from the groundwood paper on which the magazines were printed, the christening was felicitous given the condition of the heroes and miscreants by the stories' end. Pulp cut across genres, embracing Westerns ('oaters') and tales of horror, mystery and adventure, but its mainstay was the detective story. Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler wrote for the pulps, as did Cornell Woolrich, John D. Mac-



Gary Oldman as the corrupt cop in Medak's 'Romeo is Bleeding'

PULP INSTINCTS

Pulp has fired movies from Tarantino's forthcoming 'Pulp Fiction' and Medak's 'Romeo is Bleeding' to Godard's 'Weekend'. Why is pulp obsessed with meat and murder? And why is it rampant now? By Manohla Dargis

Donald, Mickey Spillane and a company of others. James M. Cain and Jim Thompson made their reputations through novels that were definitively pulp.

Every so often the pulps made it on to film, where the gore was stanchd and the sex turned down to a careful simmer. The most celebrated of these movies were adapted from popular detective fiction – for instance *The Maltese Falcon* and *Double Indemnity* – studio pictures with stars and plenty of A-movie lustre. Far closer in spirit to the pulp writing, however, were the films critic Manny Farber described as “roughneck”. Directed by the likes of Hawks, Wellman, Walsh and Mann, these were “faceless movies, taken from a type of half-polished trash writing... Tight, cliché-ridden melodramas about stock musclemen.” It was these that the young men of *Cahiers du cinéma* claimed as their own, even if, as with the ‘cinema of

quality’, they sometimes had to kill Daddy first.

In a 1955 *Cahiers*, Claude Chabrol wrote rather disingenuously: “The [American] film thriller is no more: the novel likewise. The source has dried up; renewal is impossible.” In the March 1959 issue, Luc Moullet characterised Sam Fuller’s work with bombast: “[W]e see everything other directors deliberately excise from their films: disorder, filth, the unexplainable, the stubby chin, and a kind of fascinating ugliness in a man’s face.” Moullet called Fuller a tellurian director, a primitive. That same year Godard began work on *Breathless*.

Chabrol and company championed Hollywood hires such as Nicholas Ray (especially), Hawks, Mann and Aldrich, drawn to the raw passion, poetic *mise en scène* and consummate professionalism of their movies. So it’s no surprise that when these critics turned directors, they looked to the same pulp wellspring that

had supplied their idols. Truffaut’s second film was a lyrical take on David Goodis’ novel *Shoot the Piano Player*. Made in 1960, the result is at once *nouvelle vague* and Hollywood noir, the cigarette that droops from Charles Aznavour’s mouth as authentic and heart-rending as any of Bogart’s Lucky Strikes. Truffaut would later make *The Bride Wore Black*, based on a noir by Cornell Woolrich.

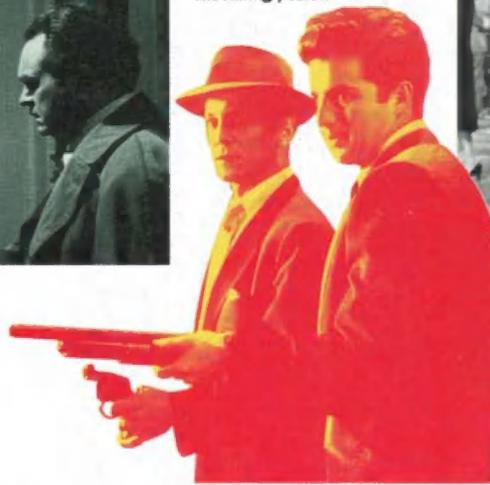
Meanwhile in Hollywood, sociological changes and a slackening production code created an atmosphere in which an American New Wave could thrive. In the 60s and into the 70s directors as distinct as Penn, the later Siegel, Peckinpah, Friedkin, Coppola and Scorsese reinvigorated genre with graphic, highly personalised stories of outlaws, gangsters, mobsters and detectives. From *Bonnie and Clyde* to *Mean Streets* and beyond, pulp defined the subject matter, look and texture of the great US ►



Shooting pains: John Travolta as Vincent, a gangster and killer in Tarantino’s ‘Pulp Fiction’



Easy death: Stanley Kubrick's nihilistic 'The Killing', below



Boys' games: John Huston's 'The Maltese Falcon', above

PULP FICTIONS

Death becomes him: Fred MacMurray in 'Double Indemnity', based on a Cain novel, above

◀ films – except that now the directors weren't hacks but auteurs, begging the question of how genuine this new instinct for pulp was, and the aesthetic limits of blood and guts.

Pure pulp went subterranean in the 80s, though A-list horror and action franchises such as *Alien*, *Die Hard*, *Lethal Weapon* and *Terminator* flourished. Then in 1992 came Tarantino's *Reservoir Dogs*, and bang, bang pulp was back. A narrative of torture and tortured narrative, *Reservoir Dogs* is the story of a well-planned heist that turns bloody. Although based loosely on Kubrick's 1956 feature *The Killing* (co-written by pulp icon Jim Thompson), Tarantino's film is in fact more Fulleresque, but refracted through *Black Mask* pulps, European art movies, Roger Corman's New World Pictures and Godard – the red that oozes out of Mr Orange's body as self-consciously gaudy as the tissue gnawed by the cannibal radicals in *Weekend*. A pasticheur and pop-cultural relativist, the 31-year-old Tarantino is as at home with Elvis as he is with Steve McQueen, Pam Grier and Shakespeare. And even more than with *Reservoir Dogs*, his screenplays for *True Romance* (directed by Tony Scott) and *Pulp Fiction* are scattershot with references to movies and TV ("Riddle me this, Batman").

Tarantino shares in his generation's cheerful bad taste and prodigious appetite for the good, the bad and the idiotic. Sonny Chiba, *The Partridge Family*, *The Brady Bunch*, 'Frankie Says Relax', *Superfly T.N.T.*, *The Guns of Navarone*, *Deliverance*, *La Femme Nikita*, *Kiss Me Deadly* and *A Flock of Seagulls* are just some of the most obvious allusions in *Pulp Fiction*. Like Godard, who once described the initial period of the *nouvelle vague* as "films de cinéphile – the work of film enthusiasts" – Tarantino enjoys raiding movie history, which is why in *Pulp Fiction* a steak isn't just a slab of beef but a joke-in-waiting:

Vincent: "I'll have the Douglas Sirk steak."

Waiter: "How d'ya want it, burnt to a crisp, or bloody as hell?"

An admitted Godard enthusiast, Tarantino writes scripts that recall the French auteur's work pre-1967 – in style, if not in politics (his are the children of Godard and Coca-Cola). *Reservoir Dogs* not only riffs on Kubrick's curves in *The Killing*, but in its linear kinkiness, casual nihilism and playful self-consciousness echoes Godard films such as *Band of Outsiders* (the name

of Tarantino's production company), *Alphaville* and *Pierrot le fou*. *Pulp Fiction* too has a playful structure, with three bridged stories framed by a prologue and epilogue. Although the title refers to the hardboiled writing of the past, the story and characters are straight out of the pop culture storehouse. Very loosely, the triptych rotates around the violent misadventures of a collection of couples including a king pin and his wife, a team of gangsters, at least two pairs of lovebirds and a set of lunatic hayseeds.

Tenderised bodies

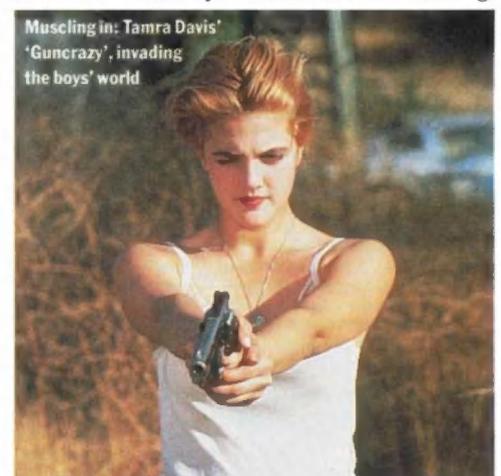
At its most demented, *Pulp Fiction* reads like a hybrid of women's romance fiction and EC Comics, equal parts love and splattertoon. Its funniest and grisliest scene turns on the efforts of a male foursome to clean the carnage from a Chevy Nova before the wife of one of the men returns. ("If she comes home from a hard day's work and finds a bunch of gangsters doin' a bunch of gangsta' shit in her kitchen, ain't no tellin' what she's apt to do.") In its step-by-step precision, the scene evokes the elaborate heist in Jules Dassin's *Du Rififi chez les hommes*, in which the thieves' impossible skill works as an ironic counterpoint to their disdain for the bourgeois workaday grind. It's also cheerfully self-reflexive, since the orchestration of the purge could easily pass for a crash course in spectacle-making with the Wolf (Harvey Keitel reprising his *Nikita* role) acting as captain of the clean-up and the scene's producer, negotiating the actors and their actions amid the slaughter ("Give me the principals' names again").

Tarantino played up the stagecraft of his violence in *Reservoir Dogs* and *True Romance* (Tim Roth's undercover rehearsal, for one). But in *Pulp Fiction* his elaborations exist in double-time, in that the scene is as much about the damage unleashed by boys-who-will-be-boys as a poke at male-female relations through the women who either enter stage right, or don't. Even if the film's central relationship is between two men, virtually all the tough guys in *Pulp Fiction* are already hooked to a woman, or on the verge.

But so far Tarantino has written only one female part as juicy as the roles he has scripted for men (Alabama in *True Romance*), and in this respect his odds are comparable to many of the

pulp auteurs. Women in pulp are more likely to be dead by act three than their men. In Peter Medak's slick neo-noir *Romeo is Bleeding*, however, screenwriter Hilary Henkin revisits the story of a bad man and a worse woman for some gleeful feminist sport. The Romeo in question is Jack Grimaldi, a crooked cop who's keeping himself busy with a wife, a mistress, a Russian gangster named Mona and the mob. Hardboiled and soft-spoken, Mona is a *femme fatale* for the 90s, a woman who squeezes the fight out of a man just by clamping together her steely thighs (she's an aerobically nut-cracker). A film about the lies women tell men and the lies men tell themselves, *Romeo is Bleeding* takes its self-conscious inspiration from Chandler and the old hardboiled school. But while the execution is more cool than pulp, the payoff is a film in which the conventional, overdetermined fear of women is the point and not the price of the story. ("She's very modern," a character says of Mona, "she wants it all, you know the kind.")

Romeo is Bleeding is just one of a clutch of new pulps that are revisionist in spirit and occasionally in execution. Another is Carl Franklin's expert suspense movie *One False Move*, which plies questions of race, sex and class with such discreet fluency it's easy to miss them altogether. Tamra Davis' *Guncrazy*, initially shot for television broadcast, is pulp through and through, from bad-seed star Drew Barrymore to its tale of doomed love on the run. But its title and *l'amour fou* hook notwithstanding,



Muscling in: Tamra Davis' 'Guncrazy', invading the boys' world

Bloodlines: Godard's homage in 'Breathless' below; the usual carnage in 'Weekend', right



Bemused, battered and bewildered: the poignancy of hurt meat in Scorsese's 'Raging Bull', right



Pulp memories: the bloody, sexual world of Arthur Pean's 'Bonnie and Clyde', below



Davis' film bears little relation to Joseph H. Lewis' noir. Instead, with its trailer-park Lolita and wicked step-daddy, it echoes James M. Cain's trashy (pseudo)-incest novel *The Butterfly*, except that this time the point of view belongs to the vixen cum victim. The kick of *One False Move* and *Gun Crazy* is that they put characters front and centre who in the past would have been supporting at best, background at worst.

But despite these nods towards women and blacks, the new pulp remains largely white and male – if white and male with a difference. An entire history of American genre film could be traced on the bruised and besieged white male body. From Westerns and gangster films to male-centred melodramas and war movies, America's great directors have displayed spectacular fascination with male bodies at risk. And whether it's Dustin Hoffman's myopia in *Straw Dogs*, the tired bones of the gunslingers in *The Wild Bunch* or De Niro's bloat in *Raging Bull*, it's risk that is answered and redeemed by pain.

The new pulp spins that familiar male pain into different contexts and conditions. Unlike the slow-motion waltzes into death in Peckinpah's *The Wild Bunch* or John Woo's *The Killer*, the torment in *Reservoir Dogs* is measured out drop by anguished, elemental drop. From first scene to last, Tarantino decelerates pain. No longer discreet in its bloodletting, the wounded body in today's pulp spurts the fountains of gore that were once the reserve of Mario Bava and Hammer Studio spectaculars. It's this graphic aspect of cinematic suffering that excites censors and moral watchdogs who credit social ills to film violence, as if a gurgling bullet hole were more culpable than the neat wounds of Hollywood past and present. But there is something agonisingly poignant about all the meat, bone and viscera. Woo employs a tender violence in his films (his victims are tenderised). Riddled with wounds that yawn open like so many stigmata, his bodies are a graphic testimony to the humanity and divinity of human flesh.

In Hollywood action pictures such as *Die Hard* and *Lethal Weapon*, the hero is bruised but never beaten: like an inflatable rubber clown he bounces back with an idiot grin for more (do it again). In movie after movie, he takes punches, kicks, even bullets to prove the inviolability of both his body and the franchise (see

it again). In contrast, Woo provides his stars with exquisite deaths – the crawl into fate in *The Killer* being exemplary – only to resurrect them in the next film. (Is it any coincidence that so many pulp directors are Catholic?) But the need for redemption reaches fever pitch in Abel Ferrara's *The Bad Lieutenant*, in which a nameless man suffers for the sins of masculinity, whiteness and the law. Here, the Reagan hardbody once idealised by Schwarzenegger and Stallone is transformed into something vulnerable, soft, as if masculinity itself were being battered into new shapes.

Ferrara makes a strong case for the fact that in pulp the word 'why' is a waste of breath. Neither the detective nor the outlaw are creatures of deep psychology; they are men of action, sensation, occasional humour ("build my gallows high, baby"), even men of God, if not necessarily reverent. When Warren Oates shoots at a conspicuously dead man in Peckinpah's *Bring Me the Head of Alfredo Garcia*, he says to no one in particular: "Why? Because it feels so good." Hammett's Continental Op pursues a similar tack: "I began to throw my right fist into him. I liked that. His belly was flabby, and it got softer every time I hit it. I hit it often."

Terror in the mirror

For all its often cheap flourishes of Freud, pulp is best characterised by unfathomables such as alienation, absolutes such as greed. (In Fuller's *The Naked Kiss*, a man's sick sex-talk is explained post haste by the fact that he's a child molester.) In its deployment of such old-fashioned truths as lust and jealousy, pulp honours a Manichean universe, going against the swells of politically, morally and ethically correct behaviour. Pulp heroes smoke, drink, fuck and sometimes kill with abandon. They aren't in twelve-step programmes, would rather give a bullet than take one, and are always and forever alone.

While the new pulp trades on familiar style – unornamented, violent and quintessentially American – the fears it traffics in are fresh. There's a scene in *True Romance* where a white character insults the white mobster who has been torturing him with a virulently racist and funny story involving Africans, Italians and eggplants. At first the story seems unmotivated – until the torturer shoots the storyteller and

ends the abuse. That racism can be answered by death is just one of the scene's brutal lessons. Another is that there is a complex snarl of masculinity, race and ethnicity that binds the male body, no matter its colour. For Tarantino, race and masculinity are conspicuous, determining and never beside the point.

The great pulp writer Charles Willeford (*Pick-Up, Cockfighter*) begins *Miami Blues* with the line: "Frederick J. Frenger, Jr., a blithe psychopath from California, asked the flight attendant in first class for another glass of champagne and some writing materials." The words don't burn as brightly as Cain's legendary opener to *The Postman Always Rings Twice* ("They threw me off the hay truck about noon"), but Willeford's meaning is clear. Like the ticking bomb that launches *Touch of Evil*, the words signal new dangers and violences, unexpected, casual, unbound, close ("In his new clothes Freddy looked like a native Miamian"). *Miami Blues* is the first in a quartet of novels about a weary homicide detective by the name of Hoke Moseley. By the end of the last one, *The Way We Die Now*, Moseley will have been irrevocably forced out of bachelor seclusion into something very much like a female commune. That the final book also chronicles a case of black bondage is an index of the terrain Willeford charts, a world not unlike that explored by Eastwood in *Unforgiven* and *A Perfect World*.

As with the very best pulp authors, Willeford explores a landscape in which an obsession with safety (border controls, vaccines, defence initiatives, the 'armed response' signs that litter neighbourhood lawns) produces nothing but terror. It's a terror that can surface in a radioactive suitcase, in life on the edge, or in the strangulated comfort of home. But more often than not it's the kind of terror that turns up in the bathroom mirror first thing in the morning, terror that put guns in hands, bullets in bodies, blood on the streets. "And he was there, of course," wrote Thompson in *Savage Night*. "Death was there. And he smelled good." Forty years later in *Pulp Fiction* Tarantino pens a character who witnesses a miracle. "I'm trying real hard to be a shepherd," says Vincent. The wonder of it is, he's trying at all.

'Pulp Fiction' will premiere at Cannes; 'Romeo is Bleeding' opens on 29 April and is reviewed on p.53

QUENTIN TARANTINO ON 'PULP FICTION'

FWhen I started *Pulp Fiction* I was trying to figure out a way to get a feature going and I came up with the idea of writing a crime short story, shooting it as a short film, then doing another and another and putting them together like a crime-film anthology. It seemed like a good idea because it would be something I could manage: finish it, take it to festivals, get notoriety, feel like a film-maker. It could be a thing in itself, and I could keep building on it until it was a feature. I wasn't a film-maker then, and I was trying to do something.

The jumping-off point was *Black Mask* magazine. Of course, it's not like *Black Mask* at all now, but that was the starting point. The thing that was cool about it is that what I wanted to do with the three stories was to start with the oldest chestnuts in the world. You've seen them a zillion times. You don't need to be caught up with the story because you already know it. The guy takes out the mob guy's wife – “but don't touch her”. And what happens if they touch? You've seen that triangle a zillion times. Or the boxer who's supposed to throw the fight and doesn't – you've seen that a zillion times too. The third story isn't an old familiar story but an old familiar situation. The story starts with Jules and Vincent going to kill some guys. That's like the opening five minutes of every other Joel Silver movie – a bunch of guys show up and *pow, pow, pow* kill somebody and then the credits start and then you see Arnold Schwarzenegger. So let's extend that whole little opening, let's hang out with them for the rest of their day and the shenanigans that follow. That's where that film came from.

It's not *noir*. I don't do neo-*noir*. I see *Pulp Fiction* as closer to modern-day crime fiction, a little closer to Charles Willeford, though I don't know if that describes it either. What's similar is that Willeford is doing his own thing with his own characters, creating a whole environment and a whole family. The thing that is so great is that those fucking characters become so real to you that when you read each new book and you find out what's going on with his daughters and his old partner, they're almost like members of your own family. I don't think I've ever felt that way about characters in a series of books before. I love J. D. Salinger's writing,

but I don't go out of my way to read his stuff because it's a little treat whenever I do read it and I don't want to gorge on it. It's like a little reward I want to give myself throughout my life.

My stuff so far has definitely fallen into what I consider pulp fiction. I think *Reservoir Dogs* fits in that, *True Romance* fits in that. I always associate lurid crime fiction with pulp. Mysteries fit into that, too. If you're going to get historical, then the whole idea of pulp, what it really means, is a paperback you don't really care about. You read it, put it in your back pocket, sit on it in the bus, and the pages start coming out, and who gives a fuck? When you're finished it you hand it to someone else to read, or you throw it away. You don't put it in your library.

Pulp sneaked in through the cracks, it was made for a certain brand of reader. The pulps weren't put under any kind of critical light except in retrospect. What's cool about that is that's how I felt about exploitation movies in the 70s. I was going to see all these movies, and they weren't put under any critical light, so you made your own discoveries, you found the diamonds in the dustbin. Stephen King talks about that in his book *Danse Macabre*, about how you have to drink a lot of milk before you can appreciate cream and you have to drink a lot of milk that's gone bad before you can appreciate milk.

If I have a problem, it's that there are so many actors I want to work with and I don't feel I'm going to have time to work with them all. So I try to take care of as many as I can in the course of one movie. The casting is really important to me, I'm knocked out by the performances everybody has given. I didn't want some star-studded bullshit – they've got real characters and when they came in they had to come to play.

One of the things Bruce Willis brings to the part is that his role as the boxer Butch is similar to some of the characters he's played, except that they've never had to run the gauntlet Butch does. I wanted Butch to be a complete fucking asshole. I wanted him to be basically like Ralph Meeker as Mike Hammer in Aldrich's *Kiss Me Deadly*. I wanted him to be a bully and a jerk, except that when he's with his girlfriend Fabian he's a sweetheart. The jumping-off point – besides bully-asshole here, sweet guy with her – was that Bruce has the look of a 50s actor. I can't think of any other star that has that look. He reminds me of Aldo Ray in Jacques Tourneur's *Nightfall*, in particular. I told him I could imagine Aldo Ray being great as Butch and he said, “Yeah, I like Aldo Ray, that's a good idea.” So I said let's go for that whole look, let's get a buzz cut and just go for it.

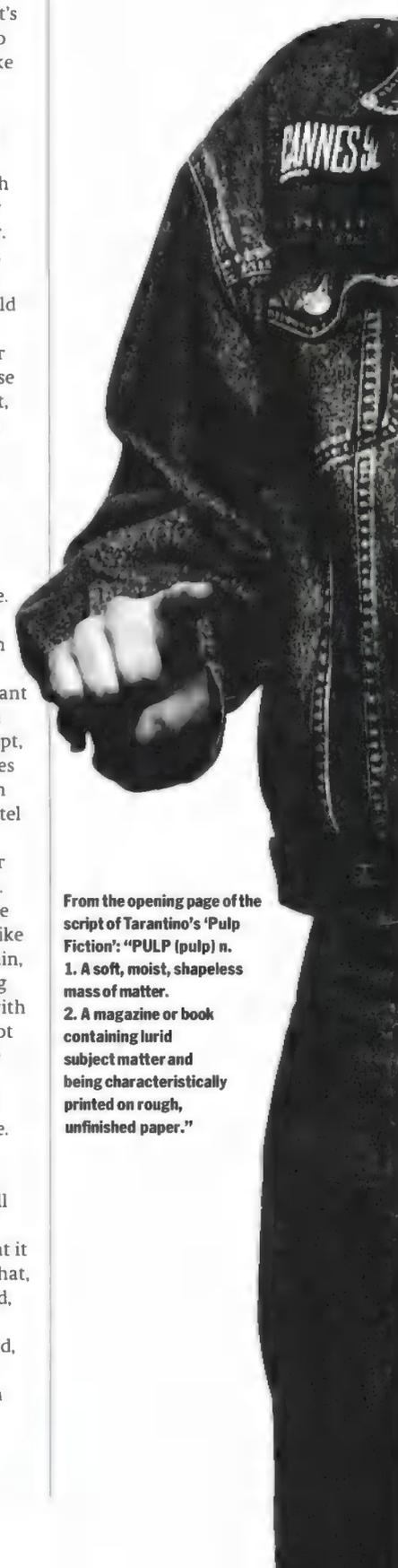
I've been a fan of John Travolta, who I got to play Vincent, forever.

I think he's one of the best actors there is. *Blow Out* is one of my favourite performances of all time, I mean of all time. But I've been very sad about how he's been used – though he has to take some blame for it himself, the movies he's been doing. But I'd sit there and look at his films of the last five years and I'd think, is this guy the best-kept secret or the best-forgotten secret out there? What is wrong with these directors? Why don't they see what they have – that if they just blew the dust off it...? And then I realised that's not going to happen. John needed to work with somebody who would take him seriously and would look at him with the love he needed.

Some parts I wrote especially for certain people. I wrote the Wolf for Harvey Keitel, I wrote the English outlaws Pumpkin and Honey Bunny for Tim Roth and Amanda Plummer. I saw them together once and it was a director's moment: I've got to put these two together in a movie. I could have been seduced by the idea of casting Tim in the Vincent role after Michael Madsen dropped out because he would have done wonders with it, but I had so much written Pumpkin and Honey Bunny for Tim and Amanda that I would never be able to get into the roles without them.

What excites me is the idea of putting people together. I would love to put Michael Madsen and Larry Fishburne together in a movie. I would love to put Larry and Sam Jackson, who plays Jules, together in a movie. I would love to put Gary Oldman and Tim Roth together, I want to put them in a comedy. To tell you the truth, if I had rewritten the script, Gary and Tim could have played Jules and Vincent, just played two English guys. I would love to put Harvey Keitel and Christopher Walken together because they've never been together in a movie, or Al Pacino and Harvey. Then there are a whole ton of people I would like to bring back, I would like to work with Michael Parks. But again, you have to stop yourself from being a total fan boy, from just working with people because you like them. It's got to be right, and if it's right it will be fucking brilliant and beautiful.

I'm using surf music as the basic score – from the 60s, Dick Dale style. I don't understand the surfer connection to surf music. To me, surf music just seems like rock'n'roll Ennio Morricone music, rock'n'roll spaghetti Western music, that's what it sounds like. That's the basic score, that, along with the songs that are played, runs throughout the film. The big song, the one that is so fucking vivid, is Urge Overkill's version of Neil Diamond's 'Girl Who'll Be a Woman Soon', which is what the boss's wife Mia is dancing to when she snorts the heroin and has her OD.



From the opening page of the script of Tarantino's 'Pulp Fiction': "PULP (pulp) n.

1. A soft, moist, shapeless mass of matter.
2. A magazine or book containing lurid subject matter and being characteristically printed on rough, unfinished paper."



**'PULP
FICTION'
SCRIPT
EXTRACT**

INT. '74 CHEVY (MOVING) – MORNING

An old gas guzzling, dirty, white 1974 Chevy Nova BARRELS down a homeless-ridden street in Hollywood. In the front seat are two young fellas – one white, one black – both wearing cheap black suits with thin black ties under long green dusters. Their names are VINCENT VEGA (white) and JULES WINNFELD (black).

Jules is behind the wheel.

Jules — okay now, tell me about the hash bars?

Vincent What do you want to know?

Jules Well, hash is legal there, right?

Vincent Yeah, it's legal, but it ain't a hundred percent legal. I mean you can't walk into a restaurant, roll a joint, and start puffin' away. You're only supposed to smoke in your home or certain designated places.

Jules Those are hash bars?

Vincent Yeah, it breaks down like this: it's legal to buy it, it's legal to own it and, if you're the proprietor of a hash bar, it's legal to sell it. It's legal to carry it, which doesn't really matter, 'cause – get a load of this – if the cops stop you, it's illegal for them to search you. Searching you is a right that the cops in Amsterdam don't have.

Jules That did it, man – I'm fuckin' goin', that's all there is to it.

Vincent You'll dig it the most. But you know what the funniest thing about Europe is?

Jules What?

Vincent It's the little differences. A lotta the same shit we got here, they got there, but there they're a little different.

Jules Example?

Vincent Well, in Amsterdam, you can buy beer in a movie theatre. And I don't mean in a paper cup either. They give you a glass of beer, like in a bar. In Paris, you can buy beer at MacDonal'd's. Also, you know what they call a Quarter Pounder with Cheese in Paris?

Jules They don't call it a Quarter Pounder with Cheese?

Vincent No, they got the metric system there, they wouldn't know what the fuck a Quarter Pounder is.

Jules What'd they call it?

Vincent Royale with Cheese

Jules (repeating) Royale with Cheese. What'd they call a Big Mac?

Vincent Big Mac's a Big Mac, but they call it Le Big Mac.

Jules What do they call a Whopper?

Vincent I dunno, I didn't go into a Burger King. But you know what they put on french fries in Holland instead of ketchup?

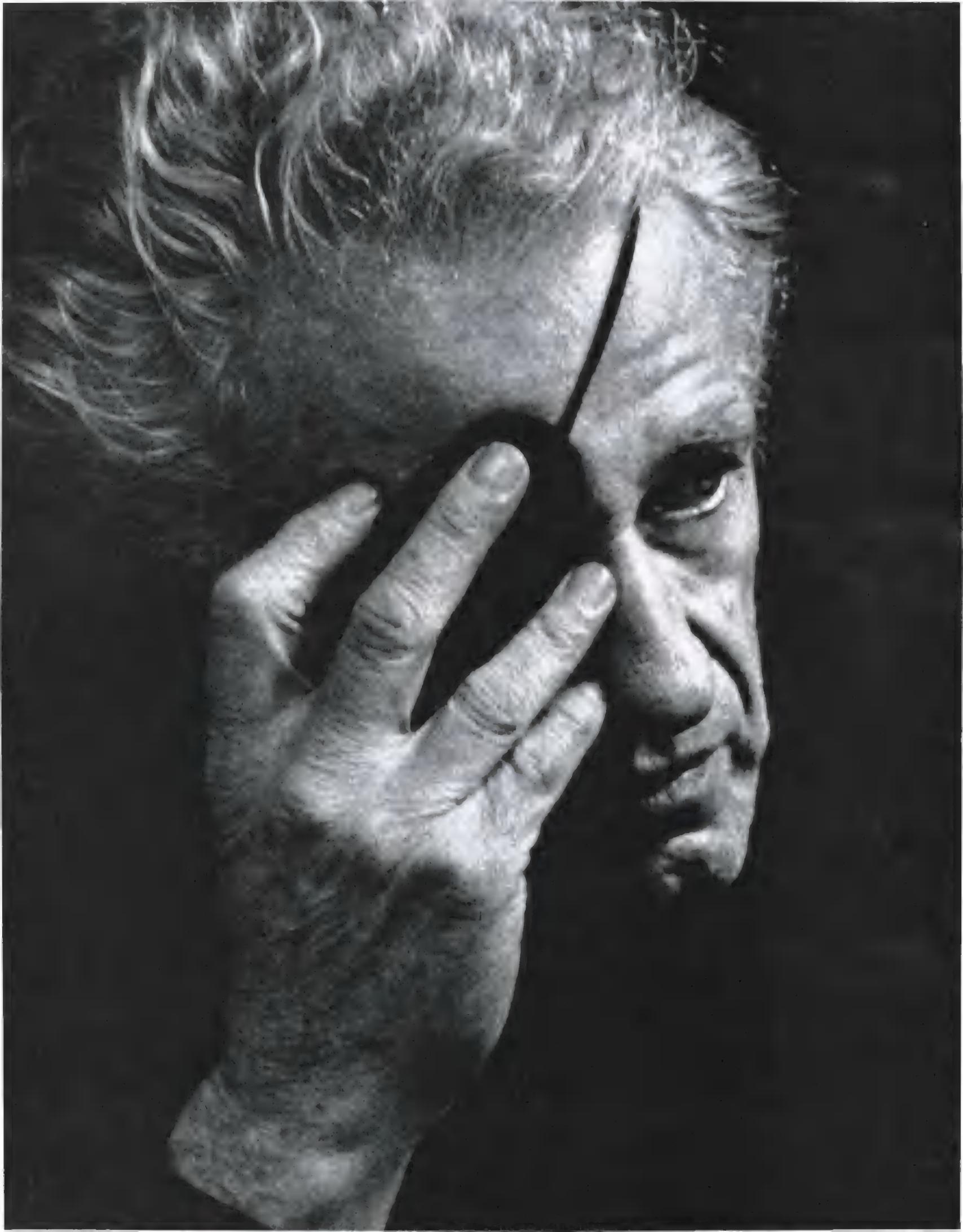
Jules What?

Vincent Mayonnaise.

Jules Goddamn!

Vincent I seen 'em do it. And I don't mean a little bit on the side of the plate, they fuckin' drown 'em in it.

Jules Uuccch!



The French critics adored Nicholas Ray. But could they understand the world of American folk music and politics that bred him? By Peter Wollen

NEVER AT HOME

● During the shooting of *Rebel without a Cause*, Nicholas Ray gave Natalie Wood a copy of Thomas Wolfe's unfinished last novel *You Can't Go Home Again*, with a chapter marked for her to read. The main characters in the film, Judy and Jim and Plato, all feel they can't go home again: instead they try touchingly, even pathetically, to set up a metaphorical home in the deserted house to which Plato leads them, substituting their own play-acting for the dismal failure of their family homes. While he was making *The Lusty Men* – another film about going home – Ray talked about Thomas Wolfe to Susan Hayward, and at the head of his personal script of *Run for Cover* he scribbled the names of two books: Wolfe's *You Can't Go Home Again* and Hardy's *Jude the Obscure*. In an autobiographical sketch typed out in 1968, Ray associated himself directly with Eugene Gant, the autobiographical hero of Wolfe's novels, and three years later, when he went to Binghamton in New York State to teach film at Harpur College, he titled the film he made with his students *We Can't Go Home Again*. At the end of his life, Ray planned to make a film with Jon



Jost, which, sadly, turned into Wim Wenders' charming, if mawkish, *Lightning over Water*. On a visit to the set, Ray's biographer, Bernard Eisenschitz, noticed a copy of Wolfe's book on the bookshelves of the New York loft where Ray lay dying. Wolfe was with him to the last.

If Nicholas Ray's films have a thematic "signature", to use the word Ray himself borrowed from *Cahiers du cinéma*, it lies in this fascination with the impossibility of going home. His greatest film, *Johnny Guitar*, is about Johnny's return to Vienna's saloon, back to a place where he can only say, as Ray often said about his own situation, wherever he might be, "I'm a stranger here myself." In his great early film *In a Lonely Place*, made for Bogart's company Santana, home – a Hollywood home – is a place that must be fled. It took Ray a long time to do so. First arriving there in 1946, having driven across the continent from New York with his future patrons and producers John Houseman and Herman Mankiewicz, Ray did not leave until he had made 16 films, at a rate of over one a year. His first, *They Live by Night*, was about two young fugitives, and the theme of wandering, of nomadism, continually re-appears in his work – sometimes quite literally, as with *Hot Blood*, a film about gypsies, or *The Lusty Men*, about itinerant rodeo riders, or *The Savage Innocents*, about the nomadic Inuit people.

At the end of his life Ray became a nomad again, wandering from campus to campus, from coast to coast, re-shooting and re-working

We Can't Go Home Again. In a way, he was only recapitulating his own early experience of wandering, travelling from small town to small town for a public arts programme, talking and listening to the local people and encouraging them to write a play based on their own stories and to stage it themselves. Starting out with the idea of using folk music to enhance the plays, Ray became an enthusiastic collector, hitch-hiking on one trip (with his friend and mentor Elia Kazan) through the pine tree country of east Texas. He recorded folk songs across the continent, from southern Alabama to northern Minnesota, lugging his Presto tape recorder and crystal mike into remote rural areas, other people's homes, to get cowboy songs and miners' songs and Indian songs on to disc and back to the Library of Congress in Washington. Alan Lomax, the great folk-music collector, commented later that, whatever his shortcomings, Ray's "heart was in the right place. He didn't know how to do it, but he was interested in the real raw guts at the bottom of the grass roots, where the shit piles up!"

Ray returned constantly to these folk-movement roots in his films – in *The True Story of Jesse James*, structured around a folk ballad recorded by an old friend and New Deal colleague, and in *Wind across the Everglades*, starring another old folk-music buddy Burl Ives (like Ray, a Thomas Wolfe fan). He used Woodie Guthrie on the soundtrack of *They Live by Night*, recorded gypsy music for *Hot Blood* – and, of course, Johnny Guitar was a travelling musician. At the end of his career, in Wenders' *The American Friend*, we can hear Nick Ray softly singing a song by another old friend – Leadbelly, whom he had first met in the Penitentiary – and at Binghamton he worked from a script inspired by Willie Nelson's 'The Red-Headed Stranger'. It somehow seems right that *The Savage Innocents* should be commemorated by Bob Dylan's 'The Mighty Quinn'. And still more right that Ray met his first producer, John Houseman, while he was directing a folk-music programme for CBS radio called *Back Where I Come From*. Houseman hired Ray to take charge of the music for a series of wartime broadcasts to Europe portraying America state by state.

This New Deal world of Alan Lomax and Elia Kazan and John Houseman, the world of folk music and the Group Theater and public radio, was a solidly leftist world. In the 30s Ray was a Communist Party member. He survived the Hollywood blacklist only because he was personally protected at his studio, RKO, by its owner Howard Hughes. Hughes liked Ray and Ray flattered and hero-worshipped Hughes, for his flying feats rather than for his politics. *Flying Leathernecks* sealed the deal. Some of Ray's old CP friends were unhappy with his slippery stance – others, like Pete Seeger, stuck with him. In retrospect the important point, whatever the political vagaries of the individuals concerned, is that the post-war renaissance of Hollywood, so long awaited by French critics, was largely produced by veterans of the Popular Front theatre movement. Orson Welles was in the forefront, of course, and then, close after, Gene Kelly, Elia Kazan, Joseph Losey and Nicholas Ray. Ray did not know Welles ▶

Rebels and causes: Nicholas Ray in *Greenwich Village*, 1970, opposite; Natalie Wood and James Dean in *'Rebel without a Cause'*, above right

BE STILL: POSERS AND DESIGNS (CHAS REGUIE) / RONALD GRANT

◀ (despite working with both Houseman and Mankiewicz), but he was close to Kelly in both New York and Los Angeles, was a disciple and assistant of Kazan, and Losey, only two years older and from the same small Wisconsin town, was always crossing Ray's path.

Most of these directors fared badly during the witch-hunt years of the 50s. Losey was driven out of Hollywood, Welles and Kelly chose to leave, Kazan and Ray survived, but Ray was hurt by his run for cover and, in the end, abandoned the industry in despair. Only Kazan, who named names, can be seen as a stable and representative Hollywood film-maker of the Cold War period. Ray never tried to make any explicitly 'political' films (until after he broke with the industry), but his work is nonetheless marked by his political background. He was one of those 30s leftists who discovered existentialism after the war and sought to promote the 'rebel' rather than the 'revolutionary'. In fact, the title of *Rebel without a Cause* appealed to him precisely because of its echo of Camus. Ray's heroes are at odds with society, they are often violent, they come from rejected and abused social groups, marginal and outsider subcultures (gypsies, juvenile delinquents, outlaws), but they are not motivated by a collective political goal. Mostly they just want to be left alone to get on with their lives, to be self-destructive in peace. Ray leaned to the left after he left Hollywood, as we can see from his involvement in the 60s in filming the anti-war march on Washington and the trial of the Chicago Ten, but even these bursts of explicit commitment often gave way to a stance of angry disaffection and inarticulate defiance.

The most explicitly political of Ray's Hollywood films is *Johnny Guitar*, in which Vienna's defiance of the lynch mob was clearly intended to evoke resistance to McCarthyism, a point underlined by the choice of the ultra-right-winger Ward Bond to play the lynch mob's leader, McIvers. Yet in the end, *Johnny Guitar*'s critical fame owes little or nothing to its politics. Nor did it owe anything to Ray's own assessment of the film. Ray frankly hated it. It was only after it achieved the status of a cult classic that he began to see anything good in it. For Ray, the problem was simple: the film got away from him on the set. This was not just the usual issue of director versus producer power: Ray was, in effect, the *de facto* producer on the

movie. *Johnny Guitar* had been set up by the giant talent agency MCA, whose immensely powerful boss, Lew Wasserman, was a friend, patron and poker partner of Ray. Wasserman more or less succeeded Hughes as Ray's powerful industry patron after Hughes pulled out of RKO. All the principals of *Johnny Guitar* were MCA clients. A hack writer, Roy Chanslor, concocted a Western novel which he dedicated to Joan Crawford. Chanslor and Crawford, like Ray and Philip Yordan, who wrote the final script, were all with MCA, where Wasserman was also packaging films for Herbert Yates' Republic studio. *Johnny Guitar* was a chance for Crawford to keep her long career going with a tailor-made script and a rising director, and a chance for Republic to enhance its success.

As it turned out, Crawford, the linchpin of the enterprise, flexed her muscles and took the film over. Very soon after shooting began – after secretly watching the shoot of Mercedes McCambridge's electrifying harangue to the posse – Crawford demanded that the script be rewritten to enhance her own role and make her, in effect, the male lead. In her unforgettable words, as remembered by Yordan, "I'm Clark Gable, it's Vienna that's gotta be the leading part." Yordan went back to his typewriter to masculinise her role, so that she replaced Sterling Hayden in the shoot-out with McCambridge at the end of the film, an all-woman duel unique in Hollywood history. At the same time he built new romantic interest into the script, while, unconventionally, making the female lead into a gun-toting, swaggering dominatrix. In Yordan's words, "We got Sterling Hayden to play her part" – that is, the traditional woman's role. This incredible mid-course crossover gave the film much of its perverse attraction. Ray, however, saw it as an infringement of his prerogatives. The wandering folk musician Johnny Guitar had become a mere foil for Crawford's Vienna, and the director-producer himself, outgunned, was relegated to the same position of powerlessness.

Crawford, of course, had already been 'masculinised' in Michael Curtiz's *Mildred Pierce*, which relaunched her faltering career at the end of the war. Curtiz's shadow fell on *Johnny Guitar* in another way too. Yordan built up the romance by borrowing from *Casablanca*. As Eisenschitz describes it, a back-story of past love and separation was now built into the

relationship. Vienna, of course, is the Bogart figure, the saloon-keeper with loyal employees harassed by the fascists and distracted by the unexpected appearance of an old love. Hayden is given the Ingrid Bergman role, the runaway who comes back 'home'. *Casablanca* is the cult film *par excellence*, and *Johnny Guitar*'s own cult status must owe something to the likeness, however oblivious Ray himself may have been to the implicit echoes. But *Johnny Guitar*'s critical reputation depended on another factor: the canonisation of Nicholas Ray as an auteur director by the *Cahiers du cinéma* critics, a claim which was argued on very different grounds. This was an accolade Curtiz never received.

Flair for CinemaScope

The first mention of Ray in *Cahiers* came from Jacques Rivette, who gave *The Lusty Men* a glowing review in October 1953. But the decisive review, of *Johnny Guitar*, came from François Truffaut. Conceding that "*Johnny Guitar* is by no means its auteur's best film," he nonetheless dubbed Ray "the Rossellini of Hollywood" and concluded with a delirious flourish, admonishing Ray's detractors: "Stop going to the cinema, don't watch any more films, for you will never know the meaning of inspiration, of a viewfinder, of poetic intuition, a frame, a shot, an idea, a good film, the cinema. An insufferable pretension? No, a wonderful certainty." Although Truffaut sketched in his own theory of Ray's thematic preoccupations – violence and the inner struggle against it, the weak man and the strong woman, the child-man, moral solitude – the main drive of his review was to praise Ray for his "absolute sincerity, his acute sensitivity," and, while acknowledging the director's technical limitations, to pick out individual shots for their poetic composition. Truffaut saw Ray as the nearest American equivalent to Rossellini, accepting that "all his films are very disjointed", that he often seems an amateur, but insisting that his films are all, in some sense, self-portraits, imbued with a personal vision revealed through the way individual shots are framed. Indeed, it is for a single 360 degree pan in *Johnny Guitar* that Bertolucci hailed Ray in *Before the Revolution*.

The floodgates were open. In December 1955 Rivette wrote in his manifesto *Notes on a Revolution* that Ray was one of the four younger directors on whom the *Cahiers* critics pinned their



hopes of a rejuvenation of Hollywood. The next year Eric Rohmer gave a magisterial endorsement to *Rebel without a Cause*, followed up by a strong review of *Bigger than Life*; subsequently Jean-Luc Godard wrote delirious raves about *Hot Blood* and *Bitter Victory*. Later, in *Pierrot le fou*, he chose *Johnny Guitar* as the film Ferdinand (Jean-Paul Belmondo) sends his nanny to see to improve her education on the same evening as he is invited to the party where he meets Sam Fuller. Ferdinand has to hire a temporary babysitter, who turns out to be Marianne (Karina) – the rest of the film, of course, is another version of *They Live by Night*. Thus the whole front line *Cahiers* team was behind Ray. Even André Bazin put in a word for *Johnny Guitar* when he reassessed the history of the Western, and he also acknowledged Ray's merits in his famous essay on the *Politique des auteurs*.

Ray could be praised alongside Anthony Mann for his vision of the Western in *Johnny Guitar*, or alongside Brooks or Aldrich or Kazan for his updating of the social protest film in *Rebel without a Cause*. But Truffaut had set the dominant tone at the beginning with his admission that Ray's masterpieces are flawed, even slapdash or amateurish, but that this very amateurishness, this lack of servitude to the values of Hollywood professionalism, allowed Ray to produce moments of authentic, self-exposing poignancy and startling visual beauty. Ray's camera may cross the line in the knife-fight scene in *Rebel*, but the energy of the scene, Ray's determination to push things right to the edge, come through all the more strongly – and if Ray often goes over the edge into confusion and inarticulacy, well, that can be forgiven.

It also counted that Ray showed a provocative flair in handling colour and CinemaScope. Like Bakst for Diaghilev, he would use daring, often lurid combinations of violent colours: red on red, green on green, or, as Godard described it, "barley-sugar orange shirts, acid-green dresses, violet cars, blue and pink carpets." Ray moved into Technicolor in 1951 and into CinemaScope in 1955, with *Rebel*. After that every feature but one was in Scope – or in the epic-scale Super Technirama – and Ray found idiosyncratic but effective ways of cutting and framing in CinemaScope (influenced, like Frank Tashlin, by comic strips) at a time when its virtues were being furiously championed by younger critics. Ray himself confessed

he was "very fond" of CinemaScope and attributed this preference to the influence of Frank Lloyd Wright, another hero, with whom he had studied architecture as a young man: "I like the horizontal line, and the horizontal was essential to Wright."

As a result, Ray came to stand for form over content, for a break with the "cinema of quality" and hidebound studio styles, for paroxysm and delirium rather than convention and security. Ray himself, as becomes clear from his own writings and lectures, was much more concerned with the traditional theatrical values of situation and character, theme and performance. His masters were Stanislavsky, Vakhtangov and Strasberg, plus, more intimately, Kazan ("the best actor's director the United States has ever produced"). Ray loved rehearsals more than anything else, the whole process of building and fine-tuning a performance, tightening the script scene by scene, coaxing and provoking the actors, wanting it to be their film. He was particularly comfortable working with James Dean because Dean had a similar commitment to performance, becoming the virtual co-director of *Rebel*. It is striking how Dean gravitated naturally to Kazan and Ray and looked weirdly out of place in George Stevens' *Giant*. Ray was always trying to bring a Group Theater approach to film-making, but succeeded only when his cast genuinely understood what he wanted or, like Bogart and Mitchum, were completely indifferent to it.

Ray and R. D. Laing

The *Cahiers* critics read Ray's films completely out of historical context, without any real sense of their political or production background. Before cheap air travel brought America closer, American films were like science fiction, and Hollywood film-makers like extra-terrestrials whose magical works were all, in some sense, documentaries about America – or about the American dream, the dream of a still distant country and a still distant future. Excited European critics met very few American film-makers, and even then only at interviews or press conferences which did little to give them more reality. The *Cahiers* critics, of course, theorised American films as virtual self-portraits of their directors, projecting their interpretation of the text back into an imaginary image of its author. Ray, when he finally appeared on the scene in

Europe, must have seemed just such an extra-terrestrial, the living distillation of his movies: bigger than life, a rebel without a cause, a savage innocent, in a lonely place, the king of kings. His dramatic personality could be taken as final proof of the justice of all the reviews that had been written.

Ray's career, like his individual films, was indeed disjointed and chaotic. Plainly he was a monster of self-destructiveness, an alcoholic, a drug-abuser, a gambler who would drop \$60,000 in one night. It is a miracle that he made as many films as he did and that they were not more flawed than they are. In retrospect, Nicholas Ray seems to have affinities not so much with Fuller or Losey or Kazan as with the other 60s sages who embarked on often self-destructive careers as prophets. There are particular similarities with R. D. Laing, for instance: the preoccupation with dysfunctional families, with violence and madness and drugs, the sympathy for troubled and rebellious youth, the longing for community, the fascination with psychological 'knots'. Ray's last film, *We Can't Go Home Again*, is weirdly like Laing's utopian project at Kingsley Hall, or the unfinished eco-community of Arcosanti, built in the Arizona desert by Paolo Soleri, another disciple of Wright. There are even echoes of Marshall McLuhan in Ray's fascination with the multiple imagery of the video-synthesiser. And behind these figures stand the heroes of his own youth – tempestuous sages like Wright or Robinson Jeffers or Thomas Wolfe.

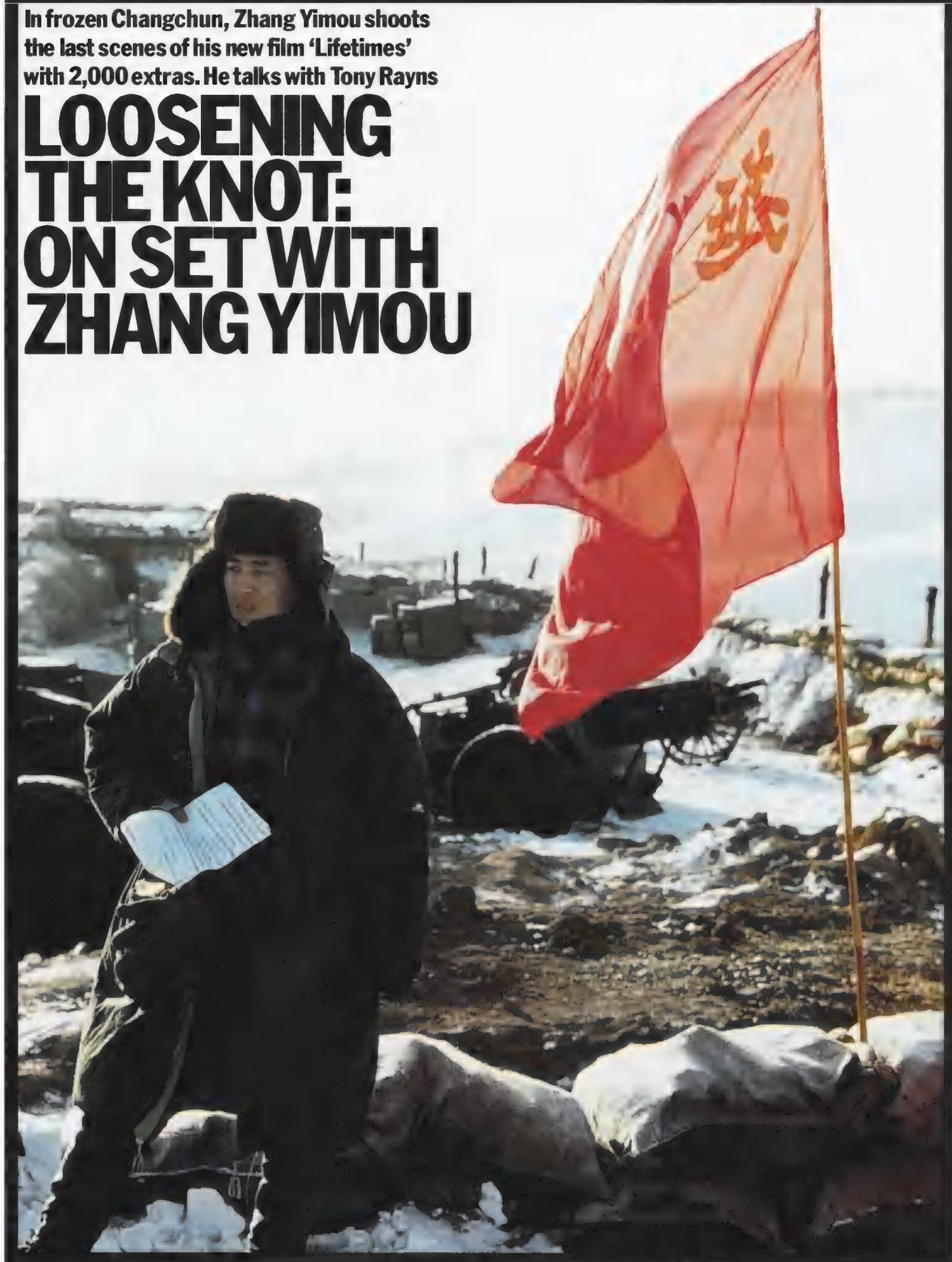
After Wolfe went back home to Asheville, where he was brought up, he wrote that "Going back taught me this one thing. A man can't go back home again. I have to move. My home is my work, now." Ray's work became his home too, and we are the ones who find ourselves going back to it, wondering – as we might about Wolfe – whether the foundations aren't a bit shaky, disconcerted that it was obviously left unfinished, half-convinced that it is about to collapse, yet consoling ourselves with the thought that, despite all, its flashes of strange and passionate beauty will justify Godard's wild claim: "The cinema is Nicholas Ray."

Bernard Eisenschitz's *Nicholas Ray: An American Journey* is published by Faber and Faber; Nicholas Ray's *I Was Interrupted: Nicholas Ray on Making Movies*, edited and introduced by Susan Ray, is published by the University of California Press



In frozen Changchun, Zhang Yimou shoots the last scenes of his new film 'Lifetimes' with 2,000 extras. He talks with Tony Rayns

LOOSENING THE KNOT: ON SET WITH ZHANG YIMOU



December in Changchun, and it's unimaginably cold. Changchun is famous for a few things: its hard winters and long, mild springs, its mining and heavy industry, and its brief heyday as the capital of Manchukuo, the puppet state set up by the Japanese in the 30s with Pu Yi as its figurehead. Later, as the Communists marched to victory in the Civil War, Changchun was the centre of the Liberated North East; the first openly Communist movies were made here in the late 40s. Latterly, though, Changchun Film Studio has been busy reviving the spirit of American International Pictures, producing murder thrillers, break-dance musicals, wrestling movies and sleazy 'social problem' dramas that have earned it little but contempt from the rest of the industry. Now Changchun Film Studio (like all but the three studios in Beijing that continue to enjoy government subsidies) is heavily in debt to the Bank of China, and its future is uncertain at best. But none of this affects Zhang Yimou. He has come to Changchun, with a team of long-time collaborators, a crew from Shanghai and money from Hong Kong/Taiwan, for the snow.

Lifetimes (*Huozhe*) is Zhang's sixth feature, and in some ways his most ambitious. The story, from a recent novel by the not yet famous writer Yu Hua, spans some four decades and follows one fragmented family from the war years of the 40s to the aftermath of the Cultural Revolution in the late 70s. The husband Fugui, played by Ge You, loses house and home on a dice throw at the outset, and scrapes a living as the narrator of shadow-puppet plays until he is pressganged as an entertainer for the troops of the KMT (Nationalist) army. The wife Jiazhen, played by Gong Li, struggles to keep going in his absence, raising their daughter Fengxia (who is left dumb by an illness) and their infant son Youqing. Reunited when the war ends, they find that their poverty gets them through the birth pangs of the People's Republic intact, but they suffer a series of misfortunes and setbacks in the following decades. Events climax during the Cultural Revolution, when Fengxia has to give birth to her first child in a hospital whose doctors have been dispatched to the 'cow-sheds' as class enemies.

Bearing in mind the needs of his lead actors, who have to age considerably as the story progresses, Zhang has shot most of the film in sequence. The opening scenes in and around Fugui's ancestral home were shot in Shaanxi Province, in a small town outside Xi'an, and the core of the story has been shot on locations in Shandong. But two departures from chronological sequence have been necessary. The first involved moving the unit to the city of Tianjin, where Zhang found the ideal location for the interior of the gambling house in which Fugui loses everything. And this is the second: a week in the Changbai Mountains outside Changchun, for the scenes in which Fugui and his friend Chunsheng are trapped between the retreating KMT army and the advancing Communists. These are in fact the last scenes to be shot – and the most spectacular, since they involve some 2,000 extras drawn from local detachments of the PLA. Zhang has left these scenes until last for two reasons. First, because

it makes logistical and economic sense to do so: big-scale scenes featuring only a couple of the main actors are best dealt with separately. And second, because he wants to be sure there is snow on the ground.

And snow there is, along with an underlay of what feels like permafrost and a wind-chill factor that must be off the scale. Changchun television last night was admitting to minus 15 degrees Celsius, but it's well below that in these mountains. Even kitted out in army greatcoats, snow boots and thick fur hats, many members of the crew find conditions hard to take. But Zhang himself, stoic as ever, barely seems to notice. I make increasingly frequent trips back to the unit minibus to warm up. During one of them, over a peanut bun and a sausage containing something like Spam, one of the army officers responsible for the extras tells me he thinks the maximum reasonable exposure is around three hours. But his charges are out in the open from dawn to nightfall, grouping and regrouping according to the radioed instructions of the assistant directors.

The main shot of the day is complicated. Zhang is shooting foreground action with Fugui and Chunsheng, then tilting the camera upwards to show the mountainous landscape, the snow... and the 2,000 extras running down a mountainside. Getting everything right entails many takes. Ge You and Guo Tao (the young actor who plays Chunsheng) have trouble with their lines and movements, mostly because of the extreme cold. In the shot, they wake in a dug-out after a night's heavy drinking and find the KMT encampment deserted; then they notice the Communist army advancing down the next mountain. There is also a problem with some of the extras; half of them are near the end of their three-year term of active duty and about to be discharged, which makes them impatient to get this over with and reluctant to run down a precipitous slope with the kind of enthusiasm Zhang requires. With one thing and another, it takes the better part of the day to get the shot.

Next day, we're back on the same location. Zhang started the day before we got here with

'If I drew on my own experiences or used my own ideas for stories, I'd be limiting myself'



The quick and the dead: Zhang Yimou in the mountains near Changchun, opposite; on the set of 'Lifetimes', above

a relatively simple shot of a field of corpses. Now he's working on another complicated shot. Fugui and Chunsheng have surrendered to the Communists, who have pressed them into service as entertainers, just as the KMT troops did. Hundreds of soldiers are gathered around a bonfire in the middle of the abandoned KMT encampment, watching a shadow-puppet play performed on a makeshift screen in the beam from the headlights of an army truck. The film's specialist adviser on traditional shadow-puppetry is on hand to instruct Guo Tao in the handling of the puppets; Ge You is miming the half-sung narration to a playback tape. Zhang Yimou wants a sweeping, Storaro-esque shot that starts on the performers, moves on to the screen and then rises to show the large and appreciative audience. But he doesn't have a crane, so the camera is mounted on one end of an elaborate see-saw rig, with three hapless crew members providing the counterbalance at the other end; a team of strong men manipulate the rig with ropes to provide a smooth and flowing camera movement. No matter how often I visit Chinese film sets, it's always a shock to be reminded that Chinese directors and cinematographers often achieve very high technical standards without access to the high-tech equipment used in other countries. Once again, there have to be several retakes before Zhang is satisfied and calls it a wrap.

Resilient laughter

It's clear from a glance through the script that the scenes I've watched being shot are not typical of the film as a whole, so it's good to hear Zhang Yimou talking about the project during and after dinner that evening. Dinner occurs in what the production manager considers to be Changchun's only good private restaurant, a mutton-ribs operation that began on the ground floor of a dingy, backstreet tenement and is now expanding into the upstairs apartments; afterwards we move to the hostel where Zhang and the crew are billeted, which turns out to belong to the local Family Planning Training Centre. It has been a long and demanding shoot, these few days in Changchun perhaps the most demanding of all, but Zhang (who seems impervious to hardships of any kind and never seems to need much sleep) is relaxed and extremely forthcoming.

"It was a short story called 'Hebian de Cuowu' [Mishap on the River Bank] that first got me interested in Yu Hua's writing," he explains. "I met him every day for a week to talk about the possibilities of filming it, and he kept dropping hints about his other writings. One day he turned up with a pile of all his books, including *Lifetimes*, which had just had its first printing. I began reading it at one in the morning, and didn't stop until I finished it. What I particularly liked was the second half, in which he describes how ordinary people survive tragedies and surmount obstacles when all they want is to live simple, normal lives. What really attracted me was the way he pinpointed their attitude to life."

All Zhang's films to date have been based on existing novels or stories. I ask him why he doesn't write or commission original screen-

◀ plays. "If I drew on my own experiences or used my own ideas for stories, I think I'd be limiting myself. Starting from another person's perspective broadens your own. It's like cooking. If you cook, you often don't feel like eating the food yourself. But if someone else cooks, you're ready to take the whole range of tastes: the sweet, the sour, the bitter, the hot chilli... In this case, I felt that Yu Hua had expressed a fundamental truth about the way we face life, especially those of us who have lived through the period he's writing about."

On the face of it, the film covers some of the same ground as recent films by Zhang's classmates Chen Kaige and Tian Zhuangzhuang; like *Farewell My Concubine* and *The Blue Kite*, it chronicles the political mistakes and consequent hardships of the early years of Communism in China. How is *Lifetimes* different?

"Mainly, I guess, in its focus on ordinary, unexceptional people. As you know, the kind of film I like best is one with several layers; the more you look into it, the more you see. But it worries me that hidden meanings are beyond the reach of many viewers. This film is a kind of experiment for me, going further than I did in *The Story of Qiu Ju*. I want to make something that any viewer can get, and if they want to look past the surface story to find what's underneath, they'll find that easy too.

"As far as the politics is concerned, films like *Farewell My Concubine* and *The Blue Kite* have dwelt on the pain and suffering of the Cultural Revolution period; Xie Jin's *Hibiscus Town* was like that too. My own feeling is that that's not adequate as a way of representing what we all lived through. I want to see and show it in a different way. What interests me is not so much the pain and suffering as what it was that enabled people to pull through. You watch Tian Zhuangzhuang's film and Chen Kaige's film with knotted brows; I want to loosen that knot a little. Of course, that period wasn't at all funny, but there was certainly some resilient laughter behind some of the tears, and that's what I want to get at. Some things that happened in the Cultural Revolution were so grotesque, they were funny."

Ge You, who is playing the first dominant male protagonist in a Zhang Yimou film since Jiang Wen in *Red Sorghum*, is known to western audiences for his role as the gay aesthete in *Farewell My Concubine*, but in China he's mainly associated with comedy. He has appeared in several adaptations of the writings of the hip/cynical young novelist Wang Shuo, and he starred in the popular television comedy series *Bianjibu de Gushi* (*Scenes from Office Life*). Are these associations why Zhang cast him as Fugui?

"Of course, yes, but this film is a great challenge for him. He has a comic face, everyone can see he's good for comedy, but in this story he has to cry too. He has never cried on screen before! I want him to bring his humour to the role, but he has to combine laughter and pain. Actually, the idea of casting him came from my wish to have the actors pull the audience into the story. In the past, my films have been very carefully composed and structured, but I want this story to be more character-driven. The film will be beautiful, and it will use some of the ele-

'Some things that happened in the Cultural Revolution were so grotesque, they were funny'



An unexceptional fate: Zhang Yimou directs Gong Li, above; Gong Li and Ge You, opposite top; Gong Li as Jiazhen struggles alone with their two children, opposite bottom

ments I've used before, but those things aren't so important to me now. For example, the shadow-puppet scenes have much less symbolic weight than the red lanterns did! The Fifth Generation directors have a reputation – perhaps not entirely undeserved – for making a big thing of traditional Chinese arts, but here the shadow-puppets are simply the way Fugui makes a living, nothing more. I want the audience to be more interested in the puppet-play narrator than in the play he's narrating. The content of the plays is not of great importance."

Does all this mean that the film's visual style will be different from Zhang's other films? "Yes. You saw a fairly elaborate crane shot today, but that's not typical. Before we started the film, I sat down with my cinematographer Lu Yue [who also shot Yim Ho's *Buddha's Lock*, 1987, and Huang Shuqin's *Spirit of a Woman Painter*, 1993] and we agreed that there would be no great stylistic flourishes. The camerawork is as naturalistic as possible, moving when necessary, static otherwise, always at the service of the characters. If audiences are moved by this film, I hope it will be because they're reacting to the story and characters and not because of anything I've done behind the camera to manipulate their perceptions. The fact is that most of my audience will have lived through the events shown in the film, and that will make them strict judges of whether or not we've succeeded in capturing the spirit of those times."

Curtailed freedoms

Lifetimes, like *Raise the Red Lantern*, is being financed and produced through the Hong Kong office of the Taiwan company Era International. Zhang has been benefiting from this kind of offshore investment ever since he made *Ju Dou*, and the same applies to many of his Fifth Generation contemporaries, including Chen Kaige, Tian Zhuangzhuang, Li Shaohong, Wu Ziniu, He Ping and Huang Jianxin. It's hard to imagine any of these directors going back to working in and for China's own studio system, and it's impossible to imagine that Chinese cinema would have reached the level of international prominence it has without non-Main-

land investment. Foreign companies have supported the Fifth Generation directors at a time when the studio system in China refused to employ them; that studio system is now in apparently terminal decline and increasingly unable to employ anyone without pushing itself further into bankruptcy.

But the Film Bureau in Beijing, architect of the current crisis through last year's economic reforms which gave the studios full responsibility for their own financial affairs, has now acted to curtail foreign investment in Chinese film-making. At the end of 1992, the Film Bureau thought it had succeeded in halting the post-production of *The Blue Kite*. Tian Zhuangzhuang was editing the film in Beijing Film Studio, but the project (financed from Hong Kong and Japan) was always supposed to be completed overseas and the negatives and sound tapes were already in Tokyo. By grounding Tian in Beijing, the Film Bureau thought it had prevented the film from being completed. So when *The Blue Kite* premiered in Cannes and went on to be distributed in all major markets, the bureaucrats in Beijing were embarrassed and greatly annoyed. Their latest move is to insist that future 'joint venture' productions must be principally financed in China, and that the negatives of such films must be processed and kept in China. They know full well that these edicts will effectively end foreign investment and are obviously ready to accept the consequences. Production of foreign-financed films such as *Farewell My Concubine*, *The Blue Kite* and now *Lifetimes* has benefited the Chinese studio system by providing work for the overstuffed and financially shaky studios, but very little profit from the films has returned to China. The Film Bureau must have calculated that the small financial returns are not worth the political grief they suffer when 'banned' films such as *The Blue Kite* slip through their fingers.

Incidentally, the Film Bureau has also acted to prevent the country's independent film- and video-makers from working by making it illegal for any production or service company to work with a list of named directors that includes Zhang Yuan, Wang Xiaoshuai, He Jianjun, Wu Wenguang and Tian Zhuangzhuang. But that's a story for another article.

In London last November, I asked Chen Kaige how he saw the situation. He was pessimistic, and related these developments to the rise of Ding Guanggen in the Propaganda Department of the Politburo – part of the jockeying for position that anticipates the power struggle that will follow the death of Deng Xiaoping. In Changchun soon after, I asked Zhang Yimou the same question, and he was not hopeful.

"I'm lucky that I began to make *Lifetimes* when I did. If the script had been submitted now, I guess it would have been refused. I've been away from Beijing for four months working on the film, so I'm not fully informed about what's happening. But the news that has reached me is very disturbing. I just hope these new regulations are something temporary; if they're not, they will certainly have serious effects on the development of film in China. Once this film is finished, I have no idea what I'll be able to do next."



One of the great animators,
Yuri Norstein talks with
Leslie Felperin Sharman

DOWN THE WHITE ROAD



Yuri Norstein is regarded by his peers as one of the world's best animators. Revered in continental Europe and Japan, his films are relatively unknown in Britain, thanks in part to the scarcity of available prints. Moreover, his work – no more than about seven films over a period of 25 years – is difficult to categorise, falling somewhere between the art-house sensibility of the Brothers Quay and Jan Svankmajer on the one hand, and the more accessible realm of mainstream animation on the other.

Norstein's early works, especially his films about animals such as 'The Heron and the Crane' (1974) and 'The Hedgehog in the Fog' (1975), have a deceptive simplicity, a faux naïveté that reflects their origins in Russian folk tales. Yet these stories are also tinged with a melancholy which derives in part from more sophisticated literary influences. His last complete work, 'Tale of Tales' (1979), which was voted the best animated film of all time by a conference of film critics in 1984, marked a significant departure. Elliptical and fluid, mixing several animation techniques, it is a dreamlike evocation of Russian childhood during the Second World War. Though it centres on the figure of a little wolf wandering around a deserted country house,

the frequent shifts of time frame and cycling of imagery make it difficult to summarise. In its preoccupation with spaces and objects as vessels of memory, it has been appropriately compared to the work of Andrei Tarkovsky generally, and to 'Mirror' in particular. Norstein's latest, so far incomplete work, is an adaptation of Gogol's 'The Overcoat', a bleak story about a clerk who gains and then loses the object of the title. It revives his preoccupation with literature and many of his earlier themes, especially suffering and despair.

It is the craftsmanship of the art work and the quality of the animation in these films which have received the greatest acclaim. Character movements are fluid and expressive. Backgrounds change subtly. Natural phenomena such as fog and snow are synchronised with the characters they envelop. The use of light is painterly and dramatic.

Despite the labour-intensive nature of the techniques he employs, Norstein works with a tiny crew. He makes extensive use of the multiplane camera, an invention patented by Disney and composed of many layers, usually glass, on which objects and backgrounds are painted. It requires many times the work of normal 'two-plane' animation, but it produces an uncanny illusion of depth. Depth has been one of Norstein's artistic interests, marked in his 1971 film 'The Battle of Kerzhenets' by the use of expressly 'flat' images from Russian icons. In 'The Overcoat', he is experimenting further with lighting techniques to enhance the possibilities of the multiplane.

Norstein was born in 1941 to Jewish parents in a suburb of Moscow. His films, especially 'Tale of Tales', have strong but obscure autobiographical references. He trained as a carpenter, painted in his spare time, and then almost by accident, drifted on to a course on animation at Soyuzmultfilm, the biggest film company in the USSR. He studied and worked with many directors there, including Roman Kachanov, and was especially influenced by Mikhail Tsekhanovsky, whose work partly inspired the interest in Constructivist graphics evident in his first film as a director, '25 October, the First Day' (1968). Norstein made all his films at a Soyuzmultfilm studio unit until he was evicted in 1986 under acrimonious circumstances. He taught animation for many years until he recently acquired studio space and financing to complete 'The Overcoat'.

Leslie Felperin Sharman: Your first passion was painting, I believe.

How has that passion translated into your work as an animator?

Yuri Norstein: Animation is informed by painting in a strict sense. If we analyse painting intellectually, we can see a continuous effort on the part of painters to capture movement and time, to incarnate them in the plastic arts. I think this interconnection between plasticity, movement and time is illustrated well by animation. For me animation is not about comic strips or continuous satirical humour – the use of the grotesque and caricature are only aspects of animation. Animation manifests itself as a new synthetic art form, though in many ways it is older than film. You have spoken about how animation can convey the 'gravity of objects' better than live-action film can.

I was talking about gesture, saying that in animation the rendering of gesture is weightier than in film or documentary. Gesture in animation can be foregrounded. We can create a field of gravity around a gesture so that it looks more realistic, has more weight than in live-action film, despite the fact that animation is a construction rather than a recording of an event.

In what other ways do you think animation can express things differently or better than live action?

Our advantage lies in the fact that we can control the flow of time at any point within a single frame, in contrast to live action, where time flows at a constant rate throughout each shot. We can influence the viewer's conscious and subconscious impressions much more subtly.

On the other hand, you have also said that you don't recognise the difference between live action and animation – both are forms of art. Have you ever thought of working in live action?

I meant that each is equally effective in its own way. When I have been invited to work in live action, because I've already "reached a plateau" in animation, the proposition has always seemed ludicrous because those who propose it assume that live action is superior to animation. But from my point of view animation is purer than live action. The great film directors are waging a war in order to overcome the implacable 'thingness', the physicality of the world. In order to transcend this and forge a coherent cinematic aesthetic, they must create their own rules, in the same way as the language of any art is governed by certain rules and conventions. For example, Fellini created films like circus spectacles. All his films, even the early ones, are rooted in the circus, which becomes a recurrent trope of cinema. Tarkovsky introduced another convention by taking an idea and developing an entire cinematic world around it, approaching it from all sides, like variations on a theme. In animation this conventionality is *a priori*, already derived from the

dictates of painting. We, as animators, have to strive to capture the deeper essentials of art.

You say that you see yourself primarily as a colourist, yet 'The Overcoat' is in black and white, in a style which suggests etchings. Is this shift to a more limited palette motivated by the story?

The palette of my films is already restricted because of my predilection for a specific type of painting. As far as *The Overcoat* is concerned, I think that the use of monochrome isn't motivated only by the story, though it is very difficult for me to imagine it in colour. But if a film is in black and white, that doesn't necessarily mean it is colourless. Colouring becomes more subtle, a matter of gradations. The grey scale can be extraordinarily rich, and the black and white image throughout *The Overcoat* has to be constructed so that by the contrast of its gradations, it gives the appearance of a colour film.

The preoccupation with space is a distinctive element of your work. Does this derive from your background as a painter or from the material you are dealing with?

This all came from my love of painting, and especially from my passion for Far Eastern art. The perspective of eastern plastic arts is constructed according to different principles from those of European art, where the vanishing point mimics the way the eye sees but not the way the mind thinks and feels. In Japanese and Chinese art space is conceived as a series of multiple fields. Similarly the Russian icon, in terms of perspective, is like a window opening out to the other side, rather than terminating at the vanishing point as in western art. Instead of being limited, the horizon is infinite. And for me, the notion of space in animation is connected to the notion of infinity – perhaps my choice of themes reflects this. For example, *The Heron and the Crane* and *The Hedgehog in the Fog* are based on a treatment of atmosphere as a physical substance in its own right, inside which objects are submerged. The air is incarnated, has an almost tactile quality.

In *The Overcoat* I think there is going to be an integration of many of my earlier concerns about space. In *Tale of Tales* light was the dominant concern. I understand the essence of cinema as light separated from darkness. The essential motif in *Tale of Tales* is that ray of light which draws you out of the darkness. In *The Overcoat*, the images that we use must draw you into the darkness. It will combine eastern and western perspectival conventions.

The gestures of your characters are highly realistic and expressive. Do you study yourself in a mirror as many other animators do, or do you use other people?

Any creative person doesn't record meticulously what he or she sees and hears. As Anna Akhmatova says, "If only you could know what muck poetry grows out of, ignorant of shame." Animation is like that, growing out of the muck. What is



Light out of darkness: Yuri Norstein's 'The Overcoat'



Lost horizons: Norstein's 'Tale of Tales', a dreamlike evocation of a Russian childhood

important is how one harmonises the disparate parts in the final film. I examine myself, but more often than not I find unexpected gestures in other people which inspire me. For *The Overcoat* I scrutinised other people shamelessly, staring straight at them, especially old women. I look at how conductors conduct the orchestra, how they move their arms. I was looking at a documentary on Shostakovich, and watched very closely how he sits, touches his chin, moves his fingers around it, moves his lips. I looked at photographs of the scientist Pyotr Kapitsa - his face reminds me somehow of the central character in *The Overcoat*, Akakii Akakevich. All this builds up in my memory, then when I am working, a gesture will suddenly suggest itself to me, and I feel I have to use it.

How influential has theatre been on your work? I noticed that in 'The Heron and the Crane' in particular the backgrounds often suggest stage sets.

The backgrounds in my work are more interactive spaces than static backdrops. But yes, they are meant to suggest stage sets since for me animation is closely related to theatre. For instance, the sound of a train whistle on a dark stage immediately sets the scene in your mind. This is one of the great strengths of theatre: its immediacy, its instantaneous presence. So for *The Heron and the Crane* we spent a long time defining the look of the space. I didn't want to make an ordinary Russian folk tale, I wanted to make a Chekhovian tale, a specifically Chekhovian/Gogolian story. It wasn't just a whim to locate the birds in a decrepit country estate. It would have been difficult for me to imagine them in any other setting because the drawings of the birds, the Heron and the Crane, are aristocratic. If I had to make a film about a duck, I would choose an entirely different setting.

When you choose a story like 'The Overcoat', do you make up a storyboard for it and organise every last detail beforehand, or is the process more random?

When I begin working on a film, I don't have an overall conception of it. Although I make a large number of preliminary storyboards and during the filming work out every new scene in a lot of detail, when I begin to shoot I improvise because new motivations, new gestures appear, and I myself am different every day. The truthfulness of the movements are of paramount importance. This is the most essential aspect of the process.

Do you do 'straight-ahead' animation, starting from the initial pose and animating each frame one after the other until the end of the sequence, or do you draw extreme poses first and then animate in between?

Straight-ahead animation. I animate the frames one by one. Because of the nature of my technique I can't use the in-between process. But this way of working demands a lot of attention and effort because you have to remember every little detail.

Do you experiment with film stock?

Yes. For example, in *Tale of Tales* the bright sequences, those depicting the family having a picnic and a traveller walking down the hill, were filmed on a different stock from the rest of the film. For them we used a black and white high-contrast stock which enhances what the drawings depict, refining the line and in some places eroding it. This stock allows you to accomplish what painters accomplish when they are drawing on white paper and have to create the effect of a line disappearing inside a beam of light.

Would you care to comment on the sequence where Akakii Akakevich copies out his documents by candlelight at home?

I love the way you use light in this sequence, reminiscent of Rembrandt.

This sequence used a multiplane, with the background distributed along

the various planes. We tried to get a specific lighting effect whereby Akakii Akakevich's shadow is cast from his figure on one plane on to the planes below. In other words, Akakii Akakevich's figure is on a plane above the shadows in the room. Sometimes we had to draw in more shadowing and register it with the real shadow. I had to use this method for several scenes, but it isn't always very noticeable.

The candle required another technique. First it flickers dimly because we wanted to convey a sense of total peace while Akakii Akakevich is copying the documents. The flame was composed of two parts which were moved against each other by microscopic increments in each frame to give the flicker effect, which goes almost unnoticed by the eye. The candlelight enhances the sense of volume and the overall quality of the light. We have a ray of light shining on Akakii Akakevich's head, and we had to find a way of shading part of it so we could emphasise his volume through the use of light alone. This is how we got the so-called "Rembrandtian" luminosity. The effect comes about through techniques which allow us to mould the figure through contrast with the shadow. In Rembrandt, this *chiaroscuro* effect came from the kind of lighting used in Dutch houses, where there was a ray of light which illuminated only a small part of the space, with everything else submerged in darkness. In this sequence in the film there is only one source of light, the candle, and it was important to create an effect whereby everything else would be plunged into darkness. Later shots use different lighting in that Akakii Akakevich is in the same room in the morning, and as dawn breaks he is illuminated in a totally different way.

Your films are very rooted in Russian culture. To what extent do you feel there is an untranslatable element in your work?

When we made *Tale of Tales*, I imagined that nobody outside Russia would understand it. But the film was well received in France, in Japan, and so forth. An American director sent me a letter in which he discussed the film and I was amazed that without having been to Russia, or knowing the Russian mind-set, Russian habits, most importantly the horror of Russian life, he completely understood it. It seems that if the artistic work is harmonious, then the internal laws of composition and harmony, which are common to all cultures, will make it comprehensible. There is, of course, a division between Europe and the east because they are ruled by different principles. They are poles apart, although I think that even these two cultures meet at some point, since the internal laws - of contrast, harmony, rhythm, the beat of the heart - are universal. I was very happy to see the film distributed in so many countries, and that people came to see it. Of course, I can't speak of Russian culture without mentioning the Bible. It will always be an eternal book and is perhaps the primal source from which all art springs, as well as Russian culture and spirituality.

In 1986 you were evicted from your studio, making it impossible for you to work on 'The Overcoat' for many years. Now you have a studio again and are back at work. Do you feel that those years were lost, or have they been useful in giving you time to think about the film?

It wasn't lost time, because I didn't stop living. Nobody put me in a freezer and then defrosted me eight years later. During that time I was saturated. I lived and grew wiser. I found out new things, although I don't think more theorising will enhance the creative process; in fact, sometimes it begins to get in the way because you begin to analyse yourself too much. The most important thing is to remain true to yourself. Those past eight years were not empty, though I am not exactly happy about what happened. The most important thing now is not to think constantly of the fact that the film could have been finished long ago. We now have to look forward and not dwell on the past.

In all your work, which sequence or image do you treasure most?

Do you mean which image would I like to go and live in?

Yes.

I'll tell you. I would like to be next to the cat who sat by the seashore and watched the fish swimming in *Tale of Tales*, or I would like to climb down the hill with the traveller in that same film, and walk down the white road with him.

Translation by Natasha Synesios
Yuri Norstein will speak at a screening of *The Overcoat* on 19 May at the International Animation Festival in Cardiff, which runs from 16 to 22 May



FALLING STARS

Star of 'Germinal' and 'My Father, the Hero', Gérard Depardieu is a rare creature – an actor made a world star by the European film industry. Why doesn't the industry produce more stars? By Angus Finney

● Our main man is big. Very big. He has a huge, cumbersome frame with a noble head locked on to powerful shoulders that suggest a manual worker rather than a famous thespian. His heavy-set face conveys suffering and passion with an unlikely ease. Europe's cinematic hero is phenomenally prolific, with official figures showing his involvement in at least 59 films in the past 20 years. He is heavily decorated with awards, actively produces and promotes cinema, and is wrapped in a cloak of invincibility. Indeed, France's heavyweight has managed to pull off that ultimate test of stardom: performing in the odd bad film and yet keeping his reputation intact.

Gérard Depardieu may not be everyone's idea of a pin-up, but he is unquestionably the biggest non-English-speaking film star that the European industry has to offer. So far, so good. But the perplexing thing is that while his status is unquestionable, his ascendancy has taken place in a vacuum. Who, if any, are his contemporary European rivals?

The European industry's almost total lack of stars capable of wielding box-office clout across the continent, let alone the world, is one of the most serious of its many problems. Stars are an essential ingredient in making cinema reach people. They help attract finance, press coverage, hype, *frisson*, and above all, audiences. With certain exceptions from the UK, Europe's feature films seem clogged with an array of domestically renowned actors, many of whom are struggling to win vague recognition from neighbouring countries, let alone international fame. The lack of a pan-European star system has major implications for an industry struggling to hold on to audiences against the powerful onslaught of Hollywood.

Even the rare European stars who are breaking through tend to have been created by Hollywood rather than by Europe's own film culture. Take the recent spate of British actors who have risen to international fame on the back of Hollywood exposure and Academy Award success. The impressive list includes Daniel Day-Lewis, Emma Thompson, Anthony Hopkins, Jeremy Irons, Miranda Richardson, Sean Connery, Gary Oldman and Alan Rickman, most of whom started their careers in television and smaller British films before making their way to Hollywood. The American machine chose to force

these talented actors down the throats of the media – a kind of catapulting into the Hollywood star system – which via its global tentacles has promoted them to international fame. It is unthinkable that their names would be known across the world today if it had been left to the marketing forces of the British industry.

Many European countries have sophisticated television star systems whose members are guaranteed the oxygen of press publicity in tankfuls. Certainly popular drama and soaps attract the same level of interest and have the same cultural centrality in the UK as Hollywood has in America. From proclivities in motorway lay-bys to the latest 'scoop' on an upcoming *Eldorado* cast bus crash, the tabloid and television cultures run a form of populist collusion, feeding off each other's stars and gossip. And there are TV stars who have an audience figure on their heads. Ask any UK executive how much John Thaw is worth for a movie of the week, and the answer will not be below 10 million viewers. By contrast, weekly statistics from *Variety* and *Screen International* demonstrate that virtually no European film star can guarantee first-week box-office returns.

In addition to domestic TV stars, Europe has continued to make stars of sportsmen and women, fashion models, artists and other popular icons over the past two decades. So why is our film industry failing to produce film stars? Part of the answer is that the creation of a star system is a direct result of marketing – the selling of a product. "Ugh, how dirty," I can hear you exclaim, as the word bruises your European aesthetic sensibilities. But the issue isn't about encouraging our big-screen talent to suck up to sleaze or tabloid merchants. What Europe's film industry needs is to start dealing in the sophisticated creation of an appetite for actors with star potential. Once this taste is established, we have to stick with the talent and be less shy about selling it to the public. Of

It is not quite 'European' to shove Binoche on to the world scene

course, someone, somewhere has to pay for this activity. In areas of the world where film stars are keenly pursued, there is also an industry in a real sense, with integrated production, distribution, mar-

Going to war: Depardieu as Mahou in Berri's 'Germinal', a film that tries to banish the triumphs of 'Jurassic Park', opposite

keting and promotion and a strong bond with other media. Leading examples include, obviously, the United States, but also India and France. Cinema is part of everyday public life in these territories; print and television are obsessed with the human-interest side of the business. And it's no coincidence that where there is a developed understanding about marketing in addition to production, distribution and exhibition, film stars are grown and nurtured in abundance.

The only European country to have a star system is France. In France, a producer can set up films with actors who have a value attached to their names. While the majority of French film financing comes via television, cinema is absolutely central to the nation's cultural life. The press and public attention paid to the likes of Catherine Deneuve, Daniel Auteuil, Emmanuelle Béart, Isabelle Adjani, Sandrine Bonnaire, Juliette Binoche and, of course, Depardieu, is enormous. Every day considerable numbers of pages of *Le Monde* and other newspapers are devoted to cinema; entire magazines are based on the film industry, with photographs, reviews, puff pieces and so on. The industry feeds on all this attention and hype – including Europe's premier film festival at Cannes – and exploits it to keep the machine well oiled.

But what works in France doesn't help to push Europe as a whole any further down the road towards creating a star system. One reason is that few French stars travel successfully. Even such a talented actress as Juliette Binoche – winner of a best actress Felix for *Les Amants du Pont Neuf* – commands no real weight on film projects outside her native country. But perhaps Binoche hasn't become an international star because no one has decided to make her one. Somehow it is 'un-European' to shove her on to the world scene, with eyes blazing and heads turning.

Even Depardieu, for all his considerable screen presence, encounters resistance outside his home territory. According to a recent report in *Variety*, independent film distributors claim that although Depardieu is the only major non-English-speaking star on the international market, his name alone cannot open a film. His ►

◀ recent English-language version of *Mon père, ce héros* has performed only moderately in the US, and his box-office figures for English-language films in general have tended to be significantly lower than for French-speaking ones. Ridley Scott's *1492: Conquest of Paradise* was a hit in France – where Depardieu spoke French – but performed less impressively in the US and UK. He is currently trying to read scripts in English and is concentrating on improving his English-speaking potential, the implication being that he will go only so far if he remains bound by his native tongue.

It would take a cultural heathen (or a Hollywood mogul) to suggest that *all* cinema must be in the English language. To argue that there is no alternative is to allow, ultimately, for cinema to become a 100 per cent American art form. "It's insulting to suggest to French, Spanish, Italian or other international film actors that if they want to be international stars, they have to learn English," says *British Screen's* Simon Perry. "Are we really saying that world cinema cannot accommodate an actor who can only speak French? That's nonsense. For that reason alone there should be mechanisms to ensure that different cinema cultures stay alive. Not only because they might contribute stars to the international arena, but because it's important that film-makers can continue to make films in their own tongues."

One of the reasons why Europe isn't producing film stars lies in the economics of the business. It is almost impossible to make a feature film on a budget that can be recouped successfully in a single European domestic market. Among the few examples of movies that perform well enough in their own territories for this to be feasible are comedies, which hardly ever succeed in travelling across borders anyway. Germany's *Otto* series, starring Otto Waalkes, and the Italian comedy *Johnny Stecchino* starring Roberto Benigni, took huge receipts at home (\$25 million for *Johnny Stecchino* in Italy) but attracted virtually no audiences anywhere else. Comic stars clearly help to lift a comedy's domestic performance, but their name recognition tends to vanish abroad.

Beyond specific genres, the nationally fragmented nature of much of Europe's industry works against the creation of star power. In contrast to the studio- and agent-dominated Hollywood set-up, Europe has an *ad hoc*, hand-to-mouth approach at best. There is no mature pan-European agent or distribution system, although both areas are amply filled by equivalent American entities. And there are no fully fledged, studio-based production power houses to underpin a strategic, long-term approach to developing star potential. As Professor Colin Young, who runs the ACE programme, a European film studio in Paris for producers, puts it: "There's clearly a reluctance on the part of the producer and agent to commit to talent who will be big later in their careers. This investment process is crucial to help a production system to work effectively."

If the European film industry is failing to create stars today, how did it manage during the *nouvelle vague* of the 60s, when it seemed to make stars out of both directors and actors? ▶

GERMINAL

Why has Berri made 'Germinal'? Has he adopted the mantle of Renoir and Carné? By Jill Forbes

KEEPING IT IN THE FAMILY

Claude Berri's reputation in Britain rests almost entirely on his hugely successful adaptations of Marcel Pagnol's 'Jean de Florette' and 'Manon des sources'. Since then, by his own account, he has been searching for a "big" subject in order to make a film whose impact will equal those blockbusters of the 80s. After a false start with an adaptation of 'Uranus', Marcel Aymé's portrait of small-town life in occupied France, he has returned triumphantly with 'Germinal', his version of Emile Zola's novel of 1885. The Paris opening, fortuitously or not, coincided with the final stages of the GATT negotiations and the appearance on French screens of Spielberg's 'Jurassic Park'. "Germinal versus Jurassic Park" screamed the headlines in all but the most sedate newspapers – a bellicose juxtaposition that served as journalistic shorthand for the whole post-war history of the French struggle against American media domination. Berri's film, which undoubtedly stiffened the resolve of the French negotiators, was propelled into the front line of the battle to 'save' French culture.

This was not just newspaper hype. Berri deliberately set out to insert 'Germinal' into a cultural debate which has exercised France for half a century. As the global market becomes a reality and European integration draws closer, so the desire to assert cultural specificity grows stronger. Culture has always been seen as the reverse side of the economic coin, as a potential, albeit ideological, trade off. It is a notion put forward not only by politicians such as former culture minister Jack Lang, but by writers such as Alain Finkielkraut, who has denounced "mass culture" as American, or theatre director Ariane Mnouchkine, who attacked Euro-Disney as a "cultural Chernobyl". The role of cinema in the defence and propagation of French culture can be traced back to the Vichy regime, when the government first intervened to protect the film industry against German domination. As in so many other walks of life, the post-war settlement did nothing to disturb this arrangement, merely substituting an American adversary for the German, but continuing to treat film imports as a Trojan horse, a war waged by other means.

This notion of cinema as both the most threatened of French cultural products and the vanguard of its cultural defences is not without irony, given the obvious resilience of the French film industry, which is by far the largest in Europe and arguably the most artistically interesting. French film producers may tell you they are on their knees, but they lie. On the other hand, as Berri emphasises, they do not seek success at any price.

The most popular film in France this season is neither 'Germinal' nor 'Jurassic Park', but 'Les Visiteurs', with 14 million domestic viewers at the last count. But this is a film which, as Berri remarks, "was not intended

to be a big success": a relatively low-budget work which happens to have struck a chord with audiences, but which as a comedy bordering on farce cannot serve as a flagship for the industry as a whole. According to Berri, popular appeal can be programmed in France in much the same way as Spielberg has done in America. Indeed, the career of this most successful of French director/producers has been directed towards that end. But what is it in the Pagnol diptych and the Zola adaptation that delivers the brand of populism Berri seeks? And is it enough to base a popular national cinema on historical adaptations that are of scant relevance to present-day concerns?

The Pagnol films tell a tale of revenge built around the control of natural resources. The elemental is foregrounded in a way that proves that 'nature will out': human nature in the form of peasant cunning, divine nature in the form of a water spring. This is not so distant from Zola. The title 'Germinal' recalls the idea that as we sow we reap, and just as the seeds of revenge are sown in 'Jean de Florette', so are the seeds of revolution in 'Germinal'. The social vision of both authors is built on the belief that predispositions, whether moral or physical, are transmitted from generation to generation, and both affirm this continuity as 'nature' pitted against an increasingly insistent 'culture'.

Above all, these films put forward a view of French history which is decidedly anti-modernist. Alongside the visual appeal of 'Jean de Florette' and 'Manon des sources' – the lush colour, the sounds and scents of the countryside before it was destroyed by intensive farming, the peculiar mix of Van Gogh and Elizabeth David that so excites the British middle classes – lies a deeper message about the perennality of the values of nature and the family. And 'Germinal', which depicts the violent industrial world that was superimposed on this Edenic garden, a world of crude industrialisation and the crude human relations it engendered, is equally nostalgic and committed to the notion of generational continuity. As we see Etienne Lantier leave the pit village in the final shots of the film, a voiceover reminds us that his legacy will germinate here in the class struggles to come.

For late-twentieth-century audiences, the mining environment of 'Germinal' – like the lost countryside of the Pagnol films – is highly exotic. It is not just that the pits have closed (earlier in France than in Britain), but the culture of solidarity they generated has all but disappeared too. The sequences that resonate with present-day concerns reflect us as though through a distorting mirror. The scene in which the pit wives castrate the grocer who refuses credit to the strikers might stand as a parodic reminder of the limits of the individualistic capitalism of the 80s which administered the coup de grace to the industrial working class in France as elsewhere, only to fatter itself. And the fact that Zola's heroine La Maheude is forced to go back down the mine to feed those members of her family who have survived the debacle of the strike stands as a curious parody of women's emancipation, a statement of the right to work for a pittance in filthy, dangerous conditions.

Like 'Jean de Florette' and 'Manon des sources', 'Germinal' is a film whose heart is

in the right place, a film which is not morally demanding. Novel and film are built around stark contrasts which alternate with insistent regularity: the toiling workers, the feckless bourgeoisie; the quarrels above ground, the solidarity below; night and day; heaven and hell; work and idleness; riches and poverty; youth and age. Zola is the master of the moral made visible – one reason, no doubt, for his appeal to film-makers. But ideologically Berri's project is more complex.

Etienne Lantier is an incomer to the pit village of Montsou, a person displaced by industrial change and forced to wander France in search of work in a hideous parody of the 'tour de la France' traditionally undertaken by apprentices to gain experience of their craft. The incomer is a favourite narrative device in the nineteenth-century novel: we find it in Stendhal, in Hugo, in Dickens, and perhaps most spectacularly in Hardy (an author who appeals to Berri, who produced Polanski's 'Tess'). The incomer usually serves as both observer and catalyst, his presence precipitating often catastrophic changes. In both 'Germinal' and the Pagnol diptych, however, the agents of change do not win through but are defeated by the forces of reaction. What triumphs in both is the family as a social unit, which both authors see as the locus of values.

This emphasis is exacerbated in Berri's adaptation of 'Germinal' by the virtual elimination of the political dimension of the novel. Zola's 'Germinal' is a curious mixture of topical observation and anachronism. It was inspired by a visit to the Anzin mine, scene of a long strike in 1884, the development of which is recounted in the novel. However, 'Germinal' purports to be set at the end of the Second Empire, in the late 1860s, when there was also considerable labour unrest in the mines which culminated in the creation of a French section of the Internationale.

The various strands of the labour movement as it unfolded are represented in the novel, with Rasseneur the pragmatic possibilist, Souvarine the anarchist, and Pluchart, who is Etienne's mentor, the syndicalist. But in the film such distinctions have all but disappeared. Early on we see a brief discussion between Rasseneur and Etienne about whether the time is ripe for a strike, but Pluchart (at least in the version released in Britain) does not figure at all, while Souvarine is not the sardonic commentator of the novel but a watchful presence whose act of sabotage is scarcely explained by his previous attitude. Berri's adaptation focuses almost entirely on the family groups, the miners and the bourgeoisie, and on the contrast between their living conditions and mores: starvation here, indulgence there; promiscuity among the workers, adultery among the middle classes. These contrasts are of course to be found in Zola, but what Berri does is to refashion his tale as a domestic drama, and, ultimately, as a picture of female indomitability, so that La Maheude, played by Miou-Miou, becomes the film's linchpin.

Such a move is perhaps unsurprising given Berri's earlier career. His life is extensively documented in his first features – 'Le Vieil Homme et l'enfant' (1966), 'Mazei Toy ou le mariage' (1968), 'Le Pistonné' (1969) and 'Le Cinéma de papa' (1970) – films whose real subject is his own close-knit Jewish immigrant family (his father was Polish, his mother Roumanian) and how his father's

abiding interest in art and films meant that instead of going into the rag trade, Claude, his sister Ariette Langmann and her partner Maurice Pialat all embarked on careers as director/producer, writer/editor and director of films respectively. Claude himself started life as an actor, though not a successful one, he claims, and from time to time he can still be seen in small parts in friends' films, often in unflattering roles like that of the homosexual punter in Patrice Chéreau's 'L'Homme blessé'.

Berri's 'Le Cinéma de papa' takes the phrase used by Truffaut to dismiss the French cinema of the 50s as outdated and turns it into an affectionate portrait of 'Daddy's cinema': Berri's father's influence on his son. The father's more difficult relationship with his daughter is depicted in Pialat's 'A nos amours', scripted by Langmann, in which Pialat himself plays the role of the father. Berri says the portrait is "completely wrong", yet what the viewer retains is the impression of an extraordinarily charismatic individual. Much of Berri's subsequent career, his gradual engagement with subjects of 'national' significance, might, were one inclined to crude analysis, be seen as a way of trying to fulfil his father's ambitions. And it is surely significant that just as the daughter Suzanne dominates in 'A nos amours', so the imaginative male characters in both 'Jean de Florette' and 'Germinal' find their masculinity challenged by women who perform their tasks or realise their ambitions for them.

Berri sees his intimist mode as having been played out by the mid-70s. The example of the nouvelle vague was ever present, and particularly of Truffaut, whom he admired extravagantly. Berri regrets he was not able to imitate Truffaut's achievement of "speaking about himself without telling the story of his life". An exception, born of deep personal unhappiness, was 'Tchao Pantin' (1983), arguably Berri's masterpiece, in which Coluche movingly plays a defrocked policeman turned night petrol-pump attendant who witnesses the brutal murder of a North African drug peddler and, despite his self-imposed withdrawal from society, gradually becomes involved in the hunt for the killers, losing his own life in the process.

A glance at Berri's activities in the 70s confirms a lack of artistic direction in his own films coupled with an increasingly sure sense of what to back as a producer: André

Téchiné's 'Souvenirs d'en France', Jacques Doillon's 'La Femme qui pleure', Jacques Rivette's 'Céline et Julie vont en bateau', as well as a series of hugely successful if artistically dubious comedies by Claude Zidi such as 'Le Moutarde me monte au nez'. But it was producing 'Tess' for Polanski – a venture he embarked on out of admiration for the director's work ("Having failed with Milos Forman [Berri had produced 'Taking Off'], I wanted to see if I could succeed with another technically brilliant East European") – that shifted Berri on to the terrain he now occupies. 'Tess' (1979) marked Berri's first real venture into literary adaptation, and though he continued throughout the 80s to produce selected auteurs – Demy, Forman, Miller, Rivette, Chéreau, all of whom he had worked with previously – the main thrust of his effort now went into large-scale productions. This marked a significant moment of change in the history of contemporary French cinema, for Berri was among the first producers to understand that cinema had to offer something different from television. French film-makers had been protected from competition with the small screen by the slow development of television in their country. But following the initial deregulation of 1975, and at the point when television companies were first allowed to participate financially in film production (prefiguring the massive privatisations of French television in the 80s), Berri switched register.

Does Berri see his cinema as helping to create a popular national culture akin to that provided by television? In an interview at the end of the 80s, he remarked that he was not interested in European cinema, but in international and national cinema, adding resignedly: "I did not seek to become involved in the GATT debate. But it was inevitable." Though he refuses to discuss competition with Hollywood, at least in the aggressive terms adopted by many of his compatriots, he is in favour of European quotas for television and of screening more European films. It seems clear that the mantle he seeks to assume is that of Renoir in the 30s and Carné in the 40s: a combination of the production values of the grand panorama and subjects that embody the "matter of France". This was Carné's achievement in 'Les Visiteurs du soir', inspired by a masterpiece of French medieval literature, and in 'Les Enfants du paradis', whose reconstruction of the great days of boulevard entertainment presented the people as the actors of history. Filmed under the Occupation, both these works were

intended to contribute to national cultural survival. In the same way, Renoir's 'La Règle du jeu' offered a critical portrait of French society just before the debacle of 1940. These works have been dismissed as "boulevard cinema", but they could also be described as populist in the best sense, with the filmmaker acting as the conscience of the nation.

Both Renoir and Carné also filmed adaptations of Zola's novels ('La Bête humaine' and 'Thérèse Raquin' respectively), but in each case it was the melodrama of Zola's narratives that dominated, the way his plots could be made to resemble those of a Hollywood film noir, and the relationship they posit between sex and death. It would appear that such subject matter is too intimist to underpin a national cinema, even in America. In this respect, 'Germinal' was well chosen, since it is more obviously political and less overtly melodramatic than some of Zola's novels. It is clear, too, that Berri has attempted to recreate the moral impact of Carné's great reconstructions. Perhaps if Alexandre Trauner, who worked for Berri on 'Tchao Pantin', had lived to design the set of 'Germinal', the machinery of the mine and the mean streets of the village might have acquired the symbolic dimension of his urban environments in 'Les Portes de la nuit' and 'Subway'. But the set of 'Germinal' is slightly flat, lacking that organic relationship with the characters who people it which we find in the best films of the 30s and 40s. The design proclaims the film's large budget and the attention to authentic detail. But what it fails to do is represent the spiritual journey to hell and back – that founding moment of consciousness which transforms the exploited worker into a revolutionary – that Etienne undertakes. It is as though a late-twentieth-century film about the labour movement, because of what has happened to labour, cannot find the visual idiom in which to express its subject.

Berri's attention is now turning to the Holocaust, to what might be called the "matter of central Europe". At present the vaguest of projects, it obviously has the potential to embody all his concerns to date – the Jewish family, his central European origins, history, personal suffering and so on. But haven't Spielberg and the Americans got there first?

Since the demise of the nouvelle vague, to be the most successful and influential French producer of your generation is to be a character constantly in search of a subject. Nor does Berri get much help from contemporary novelists, whom he feels tend not to write the kind of work that can easily be adapted to the screen. His forthcoming production, Chéreau's 'La Reine Margot', due to open in Cannes next year, is another historical reconstruction. Whatever its merits, Berri's disaffection with the contemporary, his implicit view that the present is trivial by comparison with the past, that the significance, what he calls the "emotion", he seeks can be found only through the transformation of history into spectacle, must surely point to the inevitable decline of European cinema unless history can be made relevant to the present day. It is ironic that the failure of the miners' strike in 'Germinal' seems more relevant in Britain, on the tenth anniversary of our own miners' strike, than it appears to be in France.



A dark underworld: the flooded mine in Berri's adaptation of Zola's 'Germinal'

◀ Figures such as Jean-Paul Belmondo, Alain Delon, Marcello Mastroianni and Gina Lollobrigida enjoyed successful art-house followings across Europe and attracted attention in the US as well. But somewhere along the line European cinema culture stopped wanting to create a cinematic version of the boy or girl of the year. "Over the last 20 years or so, Europe has wanted to be terribly democratic, so we've created screen characters who are exactly like anyone on the street," suggests Polish film-maker Krzysztof Zanussi. "They are not attractive or fascinating to audiences. We often blame our fragmented industry, but we should blame ourselves, the film-makers."

More specifically, Europe's glaring lack of what Hollywood calls "star vehicles" – films with high-profile, strongly written lead roles – is of no help in promoting our talent. Indeed, Sophia Loren virtually launched a "back to basics" campaign at the recent Berlin Film Festival when she argued that "the crisis throughout the European cinema is due to a lack of really good stories and strong scripts. Without these, the public isn't likely to want to come to see our films."

But the rose-tinted spectacles of nostalgia don't necessarily help to put the current problems in perspective. How genuinely successful were auteur films with audiences? Some argue that auteur cinema failed to live up to the expectations aroused for audiences by the often exaggerated claims of the critics. And even when new stars were established, the press would all too often praise them to the skies only to pounce on personality or private life to topple the idols from their pedestals. This negative cycle was recently described by UK producer Jeremy Thomas as "the dreaded poppy syndrome – the press build you up and just when you're about to flower, they chop off your head." Can Europe's newspapers, magazines and – most influential of all – television

How genuinely successful were auteur films with audiences?

be encouraged to be more strategically supportive of new talent?

Across most of Europe, the press is a more powerful tool than the cinema business. "The press doesn't have to co-operate because the cinema, let alone the non-US cinema, has no authority with them," claims Perry. "It lacks weight because in most territories it's not tapped into the culture, and papers are not dependent on film advertising. Killing someone's career is more interesting than promoting an actor over a longer period of time, and more fun than discovering them. And it sells papers more quickly."

Sometimes the tabloids get there when an actor's career has barely begun. The press treatment of Jean-Jacques Annaud's *The Lover*, which starred a new British actress Jane March, is a case in point. Talking at a recent European Film Academy Master School about the release of his French hit across the world, Annaud explained that there was a clear pattern to the movie's success: "Latin countries liked it, Asian countries loved it, and Anglo-Saxon and German ter-

ritories didn't care for it." Part of the problem was that the distributors in the UK "saw the film as provocative, something to do with sex which was nasty and dirty, so that was how it was advertised to the public."

"The worst [territory] was England. The actress was woken up in her hotel in Paris the day the film was released in France. Fifteen photographers from the trash tabloid press had come to take pictures, hoping that she would be with three lovers, a dog, a pig and a horse having sex in her hotel. Because the whole question was: did she, or didn't she? The poor girl was born in a little place called Pinner, so the headlines became: 'Pinner up!' or 'Sinner from Pinner!'"

When Annaud started to do press interviews in other territories that read the UK press, they already knew about the coverage and the angle it had taken on the film's new female star. "It's terrible sometimes when you see the promotion going wrong, but it's because the public wants it this way," he says. In the end, however, he believes that the problem lies in the relationship between the film-makers and their audience: "It's a weakness for film-makers to blame distributors, producers or finances. I think the problem is to do with ideas and style. Whenever I fail, I blame it on myself."

Clearly the will to play the star game is missing across much of the continent. To judge from some astonishingly unpolished press conference presentations at the Berlin festival, Europe would appear to specialise in actors who refuse to indulge in star-like behaviour. Take Julie Delpy, lead actress in Krzysztof Kieslowski's *Trois Couleurs: Blanc*, who has won fine reviews for her on-screen performance. When it came to meeting the press, however, she behaved "like a little girl, fumbling all over the place," according to one observer. "You couldn't believe that she had a major role in the movie. That kind of display is pretty ineffective when it comes to fan loyalty, or press loyalty for that matter."

Is it that most European actors would prefer to live their private lives in peace, untroubled by the press? Who can blame them? Wim Wenders, chairman of the European Film Academy, surprised people recently when he summed up the problem with uncharacteristic bluntness: "We need to have people who want to be stars. You cannot only 'make them'. It's incredibly hard work to be a star, and you have to be ready to do that work. That's so much more of an American tradition. A lot of European actors who mostly have a theatre background are not ready to do that work. And you cannot blame them, because some of that work is destructive. Success is almost a reason to be punished in some European countries where stars get overly criticised and hurt, and then withdraw and go back to the theatre. In that atmosphere, it's difficult to become a star."

Europe's talent is caught in a classic bind: they want to be professionally recognised by their peers, but don't want the hassle of the general public pouncing on them in the high street. And certainly Wenders is right when he affirms that the spirit of the individual is often knocked back towards the norm in Europe,

Wim Wenders: 'We need to have people who want to be stars'

with hopes of rising sky-high quickly flattened. The British are among the worst offenders here. Britain appears to enter a phase of mass incomprehension when its allegedly 'dead' film industry is seen to win

more than 20 Oscar nominations, or to pick up a cluster of prizes at Cannes, both of which it achieved last year.

So what's to be done? Some heavyweight European film figures have suggested, with a hint of irony, that a pan-European fund should be set up to invest exclusively in the marketing of European film-acting talent. Publicists point to the conspicuous dearth of European stars who interest the international press. "It's hard to get the British and French press excited about each other's new hopefuls," says Mayfair International's Zakiya Powell, an experienced publicist and now a sales agent. "I think you need to take the press out to films to write about new talent, because we need to raise the level of recognition of potential stars. And that goes for the American press as well as the Europeans. We need to budget for this kind of marketing of stars." Another idea is to try to release films at the same time in different European territories to allow distributors and PR agents to co-ordinate a pan-European promotional strategy. All too often European films dribble out in a number of countries over a period of months (and sometimes years), so that cast members are busy on their next projects and unavailable to help with the campaign.

A high degree of political will is required if Europe's film industry is to pull together. European-based agents are arguing increasingly that producers need to make more use of their clients and to become less suspicious about their access to talent. Teamwork should be directed at making European projects work properly across borders, including a strategic re-alignment of national subsidy systems. As agent Jean Diamond of London Management puts it: "Europe should stop thinking in terms of countries. We have problems with films where, because we're getting German money, they say: this part must be a German actor, or this part a French actor if it's French money. What people should be thinking is: who is right for the role? What's the right way to create a successful movie?" The dangers of over-exposure are clearly signposted too: French agents tend to grab hot young talent and exploit it remorselessly, "making them do too many films too quickly. It's no wonder they go off the boil," complains French producer Margaret Ménégoz.

Certainly more sophisticated links with the international press are required, especially in developing some kind of faithfulness to our cinematic star power. But above all a major change in perceptions has to take place. When asked about where Europe's stars are, one of the continent's senior critics privately commented: "We don't need them, do we? Those aren't the kinds of films Europe's any good at making in the first place."



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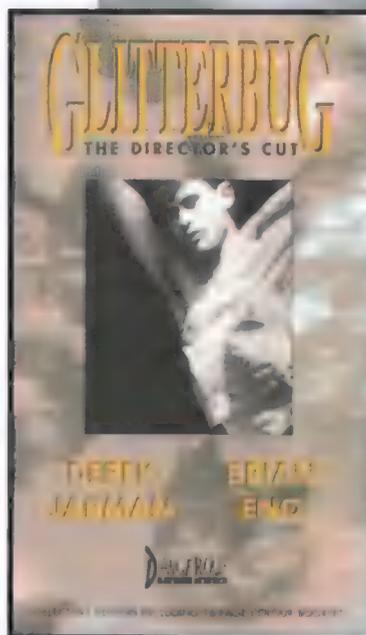
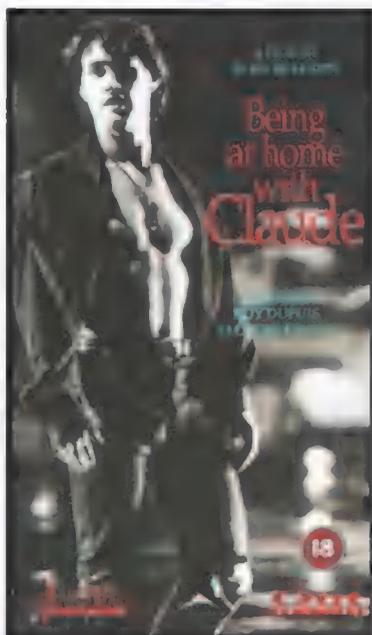
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PARANOIA AND THE PODS

With Ferrara's new version, 'Invasion of the Body Snatchers' has been remade twice. What were the story's origins? Why has it fascinated film-makers? And how has Ferrara remade it for the 90s? By J. Hoberman

"The adjusted are those who reflect their society, or their class within the society, with the least distortion." David Reisman, *The Lonely Crowd*, 1950

"This country has become a laboratory for the dark and insidious science of modern revolutionary propaganda. It is difficult for the American to realize that the ideas, the prejudices, the convictions he holds may have been deliberately – though slyly – planted in his mind by men who have a settled purpose in performing that operation, who possess the instruments of thought control and understand how to operate them." John T. Flynn, *While You Slept*, 1951

Currently in its second official remake, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* has a title that suggests nothing so much as Hollywood's boundless capacity to feed upon itself. But then, as much as it was anything, the original 1956 *Body Snatchers* – produced by Walter Wanger, directed by Don Siegel, and written (mainly) by Daniel Mainwaring from the novel by Jack Finney – has been a source of outrageous simile. The most famous B-movie allegory of the 50s, it gave the familiar Cold War fantasy of extra-terrestrial conquest an additionally paranoid twist. Drifting down from the sky, seed pods from outer space replicate human beings and replace them (as they sleep) with perfect, emotionless, vegetable doubles – thus successfully colonising the earth with the asexual other-directed drones of a harmoniously single-minded mass society.

Ever since the Truman administration began stoking up the Red Scare in 1947, communism had been visualised as a disease, a germ, a form of alien mind-control. By the time *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* appeared, however, there was also the soothing presence of President Eisenhower, the psychologically homogenising combination of Miltown and Levittown. Which was which? "As the newcomers to the middle class enter suburbia, they must disregard old values, and their sensitivity to those of the organization man is almost systematically demonstrable", noted William Whyte in his 1957 tract *The Organization Man*. And in his 1958 bestseller *Masters of Deceit*, FBI chief J. Edgar Hoover was warning Americans to "remember, always, that there are thousands of people in this country now working in secret to make it happen here."

Winston Churchill and 'The Body Snatchers'

If *High Noon* (1952) attacked Hollywood cowardice while providing justification for America's Cold War foreign policies, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* offered an all-purpose metaphor for the nation's domestic life. Like *High Noon*, also set in a nondescript western town, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* lent itself to both right- and left-wing readings – alternatively a drama of communist subversion or of suburban conformity unfolding in a hilariously bland atmosphere of hyper-vigilance. The script originally ended with a close-up of the distraught pod-fighter Dr Miles Bennell (Kevin McCarthy), screaming at the audience: "There's no escape... no time to waste. Unless you do, you'll be next!"

Given its maximally lurid title (Finney simply called his work *The Body Snatchers*), the

movie is all the more enjoyable for the podlike quality of its impressive performances and its cheap, open-air noir naturalism. Nor is this the only source of deadpan humour. An innocuous small town is the very fount of contagion; the cops have become criminal. Love is a source of terror; tranquillisers must be prescribed by creatures from another planet. Psychology is identified with brainwashing; adjustment is made synonymous with conformist coercion. The family has been infiltrated by inhuman enemies; the telephone is an instrument of surveillance. This transformation of ordinary Americans into soullessly Sovietised Babbitts was a pop 1984 complete with the notion of subversive sex crime. Normality was sinister. A sense of overwhelming anxiety inspires a desire for security, a longing to merge with the group, whether in suburbs or party cells – yet the urge to merge is a threat to the self. *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* showed America alienated from itself. The 'good' motherland is experienced as a nearly identical 'bad' one.

First appearing as *The Body Snatchers* in the 26 November, 10 December and 24 December 1954 issues of *Collier's* magazine, Finney's pods had been anticipated by the eponymous 'puppet masters' of Robert Heinlein's novel, serialised in the September 1951 issue of *Galaxy*. In the Heinlein scenario, giant slugs from Saturn's moon Titan travel to earth via a flying saucer and attach themselves to American citizens, whom they transform into zombies controlled by an unfeeling communal mind.

Although set after the Third World War, *The Puppet Masters* was totally contemporary – resembling in some respects a two-fisted, kisser-mashing Mike Hammer thriller. There is even a suggestion that the slugs have already conquered Russia (thus making it, in effect, its own puppet regime). Back in the US, these disgusting aliens actively seek to take over government officials, army brass and congressmen. Civil liberties must be suspended. The question of the hour (are you now or have you ever been a slug-zombie spy?) is superseded by the moral articulated by the book's intelligence-agent hero: "The price of freedom is the willingness to do sudden battle, anywhere, any time, and with utter recklessness."

Finney's novel is less overtly McCarthyite, particularly as it has been revised several times: first when it was published as a Dell paperback in February 1955 and again, 23 years later, when it was re-issued to coincide with Philip Kaufman's remake of the Siegel movie. As originally published in *Collier's*, *The Body Snatchers* was set during the summer of 1953, soon after the execution of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg capped a six-year hunt for communist traitors and immediately following the Korean armistice – a moment when the American press was preoccupied with stories of GIs subjected to communist 'brainwashing'. There are other Cold War markers as well. Going into battle, Miles Bennell invokes Winston Churchill: "We shall fight them in the fields, and in the streets... we shall never surrender." In *Collier's*, the story has a happy ending: the FBI successfully beats back the invasion.

As imagined by Finney, the collectivised

pods suffer from apathy, letting the town they infiltrate fall into a state of seedy decline, the stores as empty of produce as those in a drab Eastern European city. ("You can hardly even buy a Coke in most places," a travelling salesman complains to Miles. "Lately, this place has been out of coffee altogether, for no reason at all, and today when they have it, it's just lousy, terrible.") Still, for Finney's hero, the pods suggest more than just communists. As Glen M. Johnson pointed out some years ago in *The Journal of Popular Culture*, Finney's *The Body Snatchers* provides an even more comprehensive catalogue of topical anxieties than Siegel's film. At one point in the book, Miles compares the pods' false human personalities to the exaggerated servility of the middle-aged black man who runs the town shoeshine stand; elsewhere he refers to himself as a "puppet" married and divorced as if devoid of will. America is already a land of masked rage and zombie automatons.

Sorting out the politics of the men who filmed *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* is not easy.

Love thy neighbour: the good townsfolk of Siegel's original 'Invasion of the Body Snatchers', opposite; Donald Sutherland, a lonely voice in Kaufman's ageing hippy version, below



Siegel has described himself as a liberal, although his oeuvre is more suggestive of a libertarian belief in rugged individualism. Wanger, a producer with an interest in topically political material, was responsible for both the crypto-fascist *Gabriel Over the White House* (1933) and the prematurely anti-fascist *Blockade* (1938), as well as for such New Dealish genre exercises as *You Only Live Once*, *Stagecoach* and *Foreign Correspondent*. A brief stretch in prison for shooting his wife, Joan Bennett's agent, resulted in the reformist *Riot in Cell Block 11*, directed by Siegel, and perhaps the anti-capital punishment *I Want to Live*.

From pulp to classic

Although working on a budget of less than \$400,000, Wanger treated *Body Snatchers* as an important production. Scarcely had *Collier's* finished running Finney's serial than Wanger, Siegel and Siegel's erstwhile collaborator Daniel "Geoffrey Homes" Mainwaring met with the author to discuss the movie. Mainwaring, a man of left-wing associations who had begun his career writing socially conscious journalism and pulp fiction in the depths of the Depression, is credited with Miles' speech about the changes he has noted in American society: "People have allowed their human- ▶

ity to drain away... only it happens slowly rather than all at once. They didn't seem to mind." Mainwaring's previous scripts included hard-hitting exposés such as Joseph Losey's *The Lawless* and Phil Karlson's *The Phenix City Story*. During the Korean War, however, he wrote two topical cavalry Westerns – *The Last Outpost*, a key film in the construction of the 'new' action-oriented, gun-toting Ronald Reagan, and *Bugles in the Afternoon*, both stressing the importance of white antagonists uniting to fight a common Indian enemy. His anti-communist crimedrama *A Bullet for Joey*, a relentlessly perfunctory tale of atomic chicanery, served to 'clear' A. I. Bezzerides and Edward G. Robinson.

As a further complication, once *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* went into production in late March 1955, the script was reworked by Richard Collins, author of *Riot in Cell Block 11* and one of the most ambiguous figures of the blacklist era. A former Communist Party functionary, co-author of the once notorious *Song of Russia* (1943), an announced unfriendly witness first subpoenaed by the House Un-American Activities Committee in autumn 1947 among the original Hollywood Nineteen, Collins subsequently reversed field – first as an FBI informer and then as the namer of 26 names before HUAC on 12 April 1951.

Having wrapped after a brisk 23-day shoot, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* further evolved over the course of a lengthy post-production debate on how best to position the narrative. Wanger thought to preface the movie with a recent quote from Winston Churchill and, as he had in *Foreign Correspondent*, to add a didactic final warning. The necessity for a framing story, to be set up by an on-screen narrator, was perceived as increasingly urgent after a series of unsuccessful previews during the summer of 1955. Wanger's first choice for narrator was Orson Welles, drawing an obvious line to *The War of the Worlds* which had been filmed as an allegory of US-Soviet war in 1953. The alternatives were a trio of Second World War radio correspondents: Edward R. Murrow, Lowell Thomas and Quentin Reynolds.

A framing story was ultimately shot, sans celebrity narrator, in late September, thus providing the movie with a marginally more optimistic ending. And finally, the title also presented a problem. *The Body Snatchers* was too similar to Val Lewton's 1945 *The Body Snatcher*. The distributor, Allied Artists, proposed the generic *They Came from Another World*. Siegel objected strongly, offering instead *Sleep No More* and *Better Off Dead* – titles that suggested the familiar Cold War metaphor of sleep versus wakefulness and the mantra "Better dead than Red" – before the idea of 'invasion' was affixed to the threat of 'body snatchers'.

Even without Welles, Wanger was committed to the movie's liberal interpretation. In November he told the American Booksellers Convention that his still unreleased *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* was a picture on the subject of "conformity", showing "how easy it is for people to be taken over and to lose their souls if they are not alert and determined in their character to be free." Just as European commentators were quick to recognise *High Noon*'s foreign

Kaufman linked his version to the epic revival that began around the time of Richard Nixon's re-election

policy implications, so the Italian critic Ernest G. Laura was apparently the first to link *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* to the harder anti-communist rhetoric of J. Edgar Hoover and *The Reader's Digest*. Two years after the movie's release, the anti-Stalinist leftist Seymour Stern wrote programme notes for a revival at LA's Coronet Theater that took its epigram from a recent item in the *Los Angeles Times*: "India's communists today began a crucial special congress called primarily to perfect their new political technique – the attainment of absolute power through respectability." Tracing the film's lineage back to D. W. Griffith's *The Flying Torpedo* (1916), Stern gave the movie an unambiguously anti-totalitarian reading: "Long ago, the natives whose bodies are snatched by the pods had cancelled or forfeited their own birthright of sexual freedom based only on mutual consent; they had lost their liberty in meek submission to their own conservative authority. If all brands of sovietization seem here, then all forms of Fascism are here too – clerical fascism, economic fascism, political fascism, sexual fascism, social fascism, name-the-brand."

Counterculture crack-up

An instant staple of low-budget sci-fi, the 'body snatcher' premise informed two great 60s cheapsters, *Creation of the Humanoids* and *Night of the Living Dead*, was given a feminist twist in the mid-70s with *The Stepford Wives* and Valie Export's avant-garde *Invisible Adversaries*, and was finally celebrated for itself with Kaufman's 1978 remake. While the original opened on a double bill with *The Atomic Man* (a British pick-up) and was deemed too disreputable to warrant a *New York Times* review, the remake was released for Christmas and hailed by Pauline Kael in the *New Yorker* as "the American movie of the year – a new classic."

Of course, Siegel's *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* is so intrinsically 50s that Kaufman felt compelled to link his own version to the epic revival that began around the time of Richard Nixon's re-election (and continued, almost unabated, through the middle of Ronald Reagan's second term). "We were all asleep in a lot of ways in the Fifties, living conforming, other-directed types of lives. Maybe we woke up a little in the Sixties, but now we've gone back to sleep again," he told one interviewer, referring to the self-involvement and political disorientation that followed the counterculture's crack-up. Transposed to San Francisco, Kaufman's *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* reeks of local colour and urban alienation, populated by a gaggle of smart-mouthed free spirits, ex-hippies employed by the Department of Health, and smooth, hustling guru-therapists forever asking each other about their "feelings". San Francisco was still the capital of American non-conformism – even if Siegel himself had visualised it as

Dirty Harry's playground. Indeed, thanks to two recent sensational post-counterculture tragedies, the movie's setting imbued it with additional resonance. Less than a month before *Invasion of the Body Snatchers'* premiere, a deranged former member of the San Francisco Board of Supervisors assassinated both the city's mayor and its most public homosexual activist, supervisor Harvey Milk, while members of the People's Temple, formerly of San Francisco, committed mass suicide in the Guyana jungle at the behest of their leader, the Reverend Jim Jones.

Each in its way suggested that the wages of lifestyle might be death. Rather than *The Lonely Crowd*, the pop-sociological context for this second *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* was Christopher Lasch's *The Culture of Narcissism*, published just as the movie was released. Unlike the original, Kaufman's mannerist, alternately self-conscious and rhapsodic remake made little argument in favour of podification. Banality has no place in San Francisco. (Kael called the film "a surreal variant of Simone Weil's thesis that the people who resisted the Nazis weren't the good, upright citizens – they were the dreamers and outcasts and cranks." What was at stake was "the right of freaks to be freaks – which is much more appealing than the right of 'normal' people to be normal.") Less concerned with the threat of political subversion and the comfort of the lonely crowd than with the struggle against creeping psychobabble and the need to protect the environment, Kaufman's *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* is the *cri de coeur* of the ageing yuppie.

Abel Ferrara's 1993 version, by contrast, is fast-paced, impersonal and completely imagistic. As a second remake, Ferrara's film isn't hide-bound by cultural guilt – the original has already been snatched. This latest *Body Snatchers* appropriates several aspects of the Kaufman version (both were produced by Robert H. Solo), and elaborates on Kaufman's splashier special effects. The transformation from human to pod – invisible in Siegel – is even more visceral in Ferrara than in Kaufman, with tendrils descending on sleeping humans and snaking into their various orifices. And expanding on Kaufman's punchline, Ferrara explores the capacity for pod-people to transform themselves into banshee alarm systems.

Although a more expensive production than Kaufman's, Ferrara's returns the material to its B-movie roots, re-imagining it as a tough-talking action flick set not among the hot-tubs of California but on an Alabama military base. Macho is the ultimate social construction, as exemplified in an unmistakable Ferrara touch: when a military pod wants to check the status of a passing-for-pod, he tells him, "Just so you know, I fucked your girlfriend."

Delusion and illness

So familiar has the 'body snatchers' metaphor become that it's worth noting that back in 1956 *Variety* found the original sometimes "difficult to follow due to the strangeness of its scientific premise". As film theorist Noel Carroll has pointed out, however, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* offers a near textbook illustration of a con-



Visceral pleasures: Ferrara's 'Body Snatchers' have tendrils that snake around and inside their victims

dition called Capgras syndrome – the delusional belief that close relatives or associates, sometimes including one's pets or oneself, have been replaced by sinister doubles. (Indeed, despite considerable evidence to the contrary, Finney has described his novel in similar terms: "For years now, I've been amused by the fairly widely held notion that *The Body Snatchers* has anything to do with the cold war, McCarthyism, conformity... It does not. I was simply intrigued by the notion of a lot of people insisting that their friends and relatives were impostors.") *I Married a Monster from Outer Space* (1958) and the original *Invaders from Mars* (1953) are related examples of Capgrasoid sci-fi, and a study of the syndrome's case histories shows that imagined communist conspiracies were scarcely unknown during the heightened suspicion of the Cold War.

Capgras syndrome has been variously analysed as a paranoid projection (if a familiar person no longer elicits the same affective response, the person must have changed rather than the subject's feelings) and as the denial of certain negative traits in one with whom the subject has strong emotional ties. As Capgras syndrome suggests the need to idealise a particular individual, it makes sense that the original *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* would appear soon after the 1948/53 period of maximum mobilisation – once it was safe to dramatise the recent hysteria and meditate on the Pod That Failed. Capgras syndrome has also been theorised as a defensive manoeuvre that allows the subject to handle erotic or aggressive feelings towards a parental figure, and it is in this sense that Ferrara's *Body Snatchers* is most vivid. Almost devoid of children, Kaufman's 1978 film focuses exclusively on mature heterosexual relationships. Ferrara's current version, though, concerns the nuclear family. The protagonist Marti Malone is

an estranged teenage stepdaughter – for her, mother has long since been replaced by the soulless pod of the second Mrs Malone. The big chill here is a daycare centre where the children produce identical finger paintings; the key sequence has Mrs Malone disintegrate in her sleep, then reappear naked and impassively witchy before her five-year-old son ("That isn't my mommy!"), who is subsequently trapped between zombie daycare and imposter mom.

No more crying

To grow up and join society is *a priori* to become a conformist pod. While this is at least implicit in the Siegel version – at one point podified parents place an alien spore in their baby's crib with the comment that "there'll be no more crying" – it is Ferrara's subject. His movie feeds on the tension between father and daughter, pitting Marti and her off-limits soldier boyfriend against the rest of the family. That Mr Malone works for the Environmental Protection Agency is a red herring – although, unlike both previous movies, Ferrara makes the resident shrink (Forest Whitaker) a heroic pod-fighter. The army base is at once an updated suburbia, a prison camp and a toxic waste dump. Indeed, Ferrara turns the Capgras syndrome into a universal principle: given the demands of military discipline, how can you tell when a soldier is a pod? The klaxon blare of the base's full-alert only amplifies the individual's need to protect his or her ego by remaining awake.

As the troubled Malone family is a transplant from *Rebel without a Cause*, so the base commander is played by R. Lee Ermey, promoted from his tour of duty as marine drill sergeant in *Full Metal Jacket*. Explicitly post-Desert Storm (the war commanded by the most severely pod-like of recent US presidents), and

featuring a complete panoply of firefighters, choppers and bombing raids, as well as a story of adolescent sexual acting out, the movie collapses the whole of baby-boomer history – from the Cold War through Vietnam to the New World Order – into a single package. Ferrara even manages to evoke Oliver Stone: pod subversion is envisioned as a military coup.

And yet if this latest *Body Snatchers* leaves less of a residue than Kaufman's, the fault is less Ferrara's than history's. (One wonders whether Disney's belated adaptation of *The Puppet Masters*, due later this year, will have any resonance at all.) Bucking the positivist trend of the late 70s, Kaufman deliberately positioned his remake in direct opposition to the current feel-good space invasion of *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* – although within a year one of his ideas had been co-opted in Steven Spielberg and George Lucas' supremely soulless *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. Ferrara, by contrast, can only position his remake in opposition to the inflated B-movie ethos that Spielberg and Lucas have long since established.

Looking back on the Cold War from the post-McCarthy period, Siegel and company not only naturalised the Red Scare, but imbued it with Darwinian angst – the fear that communism might actually be a higher stage on the evolutionary ladder. The original *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* provided an imaginative visualisation of the national security state and reckoned its psychic cost to America's self-image. At this point – and this may be the point – Americans no longer even have that identity left to lose. Abel Ferrara's *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* is playing at the Broadway, Nottingham on 25 and 26 April; Bradford Film Theatre on 29 and 30 April; Lancaster Film Theatre on 29 May; Norwich Cinema City on 10 June; Phoenix Theatre, Leicester on 24 June. It is also available on video

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My father and Cary Grant

I'm in Narita airport waiting for our delayed flight to London. The snow gets heavier and heavier, while in the café the imprisoned Japanese would-be passengers happily eat and drink the hours away. After living in England for 16 years, I'm not prepared to pay £2 for a coffee, so I have been eating a packet of rice crackers and watching an old Hollywood film on the waiting area television screen. I start to think of my father. The combination of rice crackers and watching a film on television always takes me back to my father's study when I was a little girl, to watching a film with my father stretched out on his settee. Those Hollywood films, that fantasised sophistication, Cary Grant, the playful detachment of British men... A father in front of me has started to change his baby's nappy. Japanese men are changing. So am I. Two weeks ago, for the first time in my life, I had to change my father's knickers.

I was due to go back to England three weeks ago, but the day after I arrived in Japan, my 81-year-old father had a stroke. When we discovered him he declared to my mother from the floor, "The left side of my body is paralysed. Call an ambulance! You know you have to dial 119?" Then he started to instruct me about what and how I should be packing. I was running around his room for a while trying to avoid his body in the middle. He was carried to a very modern Tokyo city hospital. During that time I changed my father's knickers, while the nurse was absent. He was very cool about it. I was more emotional.

I prolonged my stay until he was ready for rehabilitation. When I finally left, he asked me to come back as soon as possible. This was a sweet shock to me, because he had never demanded anything emotional from me in the past. He has been a very detached father, although a kind and supportive one. He probably thought it was bad manners to show too much affection towards his children - in fact, to anybody, including his wife. My mother seems to have been in awe of him and we - my elder brother and I - followed her example. Consequently when I was small we didn't spend much intimate time together - except to watch old films.

When I was young my family had two televisions - one in the dining room and one in my father's study. My father was a scientist and he loved reading, or rather collecting, books. His study was filled with books and it was a place for him to develop his very important thought and knowledge away from the family's noisy business. At least that's how my mother portrayed it. As his study was such a sacred and untouchable place, we were not allowed to enter casually, not even the cleaning lady. He has maintained the enigma about his room until this day, so that when the ambulance men arrived my mother was concerned about the state of his room. Once, my cat hid her very young kitten in the drawer of his desk. She knew they wouldn't be disturbed there, although she had difficulty getting into the drawer herself. My mother explained this incident to us by saying that the cat realised that my father had a lot

Waiting on a plane to leave Japan, singer and songwriter Kazuko Hohki of Frank Chickens remembers eating rice crackers with her father and watching the sophisticated Cary Grant

of affection beneath his detached exterior. I wasn't convinced, knowing we were all starved of my father's affection, especially my mother. This year, within a few days of my father's admission to hospital, almost as an act of revenge, she asked the cleaning lady to clean his room - she told me how happy she was about this.

We usually watched television in the dining room. However, there were two occasions when we could go into my father's room and watch his television. One was for baseball (my brother sharing with my father), and the other was for watching American and European films. I shared this with my father. Around 1960 Japanese television showed a lot of western programmes and films. I loved them all. *Dr Kildare*, *Lost in Space*, *The Twilight Zone*, *The Beverly Hillbillies*, *The Saint*, *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.* - I thought the people in these programmes were much more sophisticated than Japanese people in Japanese programmes. The way they moved their arms when they were talking was sophisticated, the way they changed their cardigans to go out was sophisticated, the way they used knives and forks without any apparent concentration was sophisticated. My father didn't share this craze, but he liked old American films.

There was a weekly programme called *Nichiyo Meiga Gekijo* (*Sunday Vintage Cinema*) that showed famous old films, mainly Hollywood. In fact, it never showed Japanese films, though we already had excellent old directors like Ozu and Mizoguchi. I think respect for western culture was so high - they had dared to bomb us! - that Japanese films could not be considered 'Vintage'. So every Sunday evening I entered my father's room with my cat - who had been a baby kitten in his desk drawer. My father would stop reading on his settee and we would start our own cinema, eating rice crackers from my father's supply. Sometimes we drove the cat crazy by eating dried squid.

We didn't talk about the films much, though I remember one occasion when we

were watching a film called *Haunted*, about a house with a ghost. I was very scared, and he told me in a determined voice: "It's just a film." I think I remember it because I sensed the fear in his tone, and I must have been impressed by the fact that the film disturbed my detached father.

This was where I watched James Bond, *Wuthering Heights*, Audrey Hepburn, film noir, Hitchcock, John Wayne, James Dean, Doris Day, Brigitte Bardot... I discovered Cary Grant, and I thought he represented the ultimate in western sophistication, which was apparently British and somehow involved detachment - a bit like my father, but with much more anarchic humour. I especially liked the film *The Grass Is Greener*, in which Cary Grant is a pathetic but charming British aristocrat. His wife (Deborah Kerr) feels she is not loved by her husband since he doesn't express his affection openly, so she becomes attracted to an American businessman (Robert Mitchum) who has more obvious passion. I thought Cary Grant's detached manner was so elegant, his simpleness underneath it so cute, his conversation so witty. He became my ideal man after Spiller in *The Borrowers*, which was another British thing I was obsessed with when I was much younger. And Spiller was even more detached. Eating rice crackers and watching those films beside my father, I was nourishing my obsession with western culture, and especially British culture, without knowing that that particular British culture was a web of fantasy spun by Hollywood herself.

Nine hours after the scheduled take-off time, my plane is still in the airport. Now I am confined to a seat inside the plane, though it doesn't look as if it will take off for a while yet. I'm thinking of my father confined to his bed. Staring at the snow outside, my eyes start to feel warm as I remember the words with which he 'came out' emotionally: "Please come back as soon as possible." Even Cary Grant had to become emotional on some occasions. I remember.



Playful detachment: Cary Grant, sophisticated and cool, in 'The Grass Is Greener'

Isn't it queer?

Andy Medhurst

Queer Looks: Perspectives on Lesbian and Gay Film and Video

Martha Gever, John Greyson, Pratibha Parmar (eds), Routledge, £40 (hb), £14.99 (pb), 413pp

Making Things Perfectly Queer:

Interpreting Mass Culture

Alexander Doty, University of Minnesota Press, \$39.95 (hb), \$15.95 (pb), 146pp

Broadcasting It: An Encyclopaedia of Homosexuality on Film, Radio and TV in the UK 1923-93

Keith Howes, Cassell, £19.99, 960pp

As attentive readers of this journal will recall, September 1992 was the month of New Queer Cinema. A *Sight and Sound* special supplement commented on and contextualised a season and conference on the topic at London's Institute of Contemporary Arts, and the buzz was palpable. It seemed that the vibrancy and daring of the emerging strategies of queer politics, hitherto confined to the activist arenas of protests, pamphlets and hastily made videos, were at last to explode over the big screen.

So what happened? The bubble burst. The conference committed conceptual hara-kiri before the weekend was over, concluding that NQC was a great marketing label, but a lousy intellectual umbrella. The films at the centre of the hype (primarily Tom Kalin's fascinating, if showily cerebral, *Swoon*) found a muted welcome in the queer communities they were intended to energise.

This is not to say that queerness has evaporated. Queer is still the word that plenty of us (myself included) currently choose to identify with; its impatience – rooted in the righteous rage of Aids activism – with the gradual reformist liberalism of 'gay' politics still holds true. In the field of representation, queer's great achievement has been to get us beyond that dead-end binary of positive/negative images. Nine times out of ten a 'positive image' is one that courts heterosexual approval, an assimilationist craving that queer culture rejects in favour of a repertoire of depictions that are impolite, unapologetic, angry, scandalous, fabulous.

It is the contention of *Queer Looks* that such depictions can be found only in the sectors of independent, art and avant-garde film and video. A varied, occasionally uneven collection, its contributing practitioners and critics are rightly wary of establishing any kind of queer representational orthodoxy (the fatal flaw that scuppered New Queer Cinema), preferring instead to document the sheer diversity of work currently being produced, from Germany to New York to Bristol to the Philippines.

If a lot of the writing gathered here has the drawback of seeming hurried and unfinished, at the same time it has the virtues of immediacy and urgency. Queer culture is very much a work in progress, and *Queer Looks'* snapshot of this-is-how-it-is-for-now will undoubtedly prove an invaluable source for retrospective reference. Nevertheless, there are some shortcomings in the anthology that need to be addressed.

The most grating of these is the tone of self-righteous vanguardism that pervades so much writing about independent film. The editors, in the introduction, airily ele-

vate themselves above "boring 70s preoccupations with classic narrative structures". While such hostility towards mainstream film is nothing new (it is, in fact, far more typically 70s than an interest in deconstructing Hollywood), it masks a more elitist presumption – a contemptuous dismissal of Hollywood's audiences. Who, after all, is able to see most of the films and videos so lushly celebrated in *Queer Looks*, and who would enjoy them if they did? There is a charmed-circle, closed-circuit, self-perpetuating market for these texts (it's noticeable how many of the essays come garlanded with footnotes about, and thanks to, other contributors) which has worryingly little regard for reaching a broader clientele – and by broader I'm not suggesting a capitulation to the heterosexual mainstream, just a little more thought for the millions of queers whose tastes don't run to avant-garde abstractions and films you need Foucault to understand.

Queer Looks does contain constructive pieces on films that have been relatively widely seen (Fassbinder, Visconti, *Desert Hearts*, *Looking for Langston*), but these critical essays stand somewhat outside the central drive of the collection, the voices of filmmakers themselves. Many of these talk well (indeed, given their respective skills of verbal clarity and visual obscurity, at times one wishes they'd chosen to work as writers full time), but there remains the constant danger of the unchallenged authorial voice. These chapters (from Barbara Hammer, Jerry Tartaglia, Richard Fung, among others) fall midway between credo and *cri de coeur*, indulgent testimonies that veer from well-meant hollowness ("I hope my cinema is a cinema of liberation") to unconscious self-parody ("Since I myself use condoms for anal sex, I was able to create characters that naturally use condoms").

One of the distinctive and welcome emphases in the collection is its insistence on exploring the interconnections of ethnicity and sexuality, but there is scarcely any mention of how queerness might relate to class. This could partly be due to the fact that in the contemporary world of politically correct publishing, race sells and class doesn't, as well as to the legendary inability of North Americans (who dominate the book, despite its internationalist trappings) to grasp the importance of class as an analytical framework.

There is, however, a third reason, one which, when taken in tandem with the book's dismissal of popular culture, reveals its greatest limitation. Put simply, and no doubt unfairly, it's the fact that the contributors to this book, the oppressions of homophobia notwithstanding, are very privileged people, taking understandable advantage of the grants and sponsorships and sinecures that make their work possible, that transform them into semiotic global warriors jetting from conference to festival, the cutting edge of Club Class. The world inhabited by the contributors to *Queer Looks* is one where a visitor to Toronto can be described as "in town for the weekend from London". It's really not surprising that they have little time for the media texts that most of us consume.

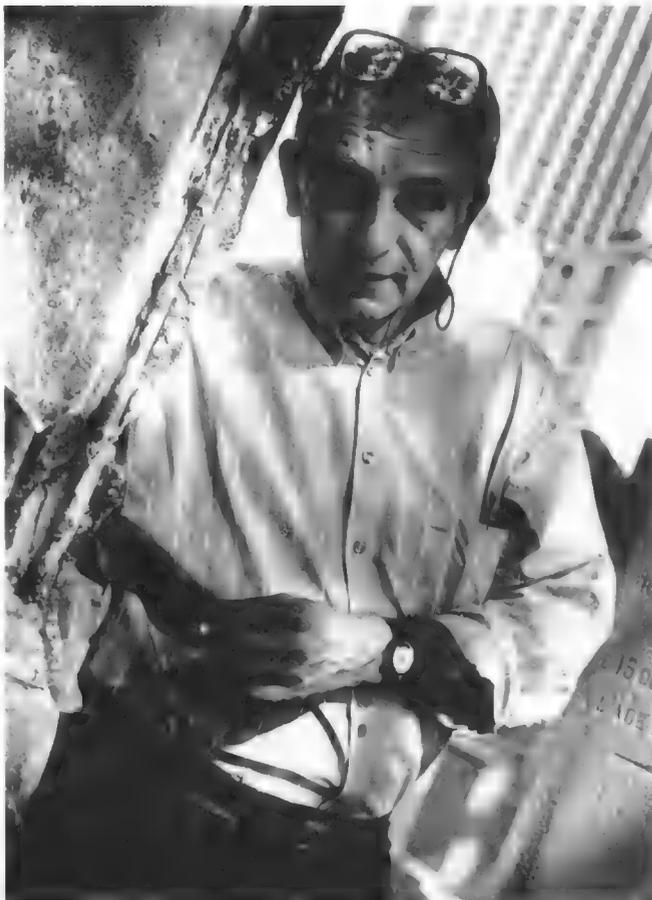
Alexander Doty's focus in the splendidly titled *Making Things Perfectly Queer* is unwaveringly on the kind of popular culture so absent from the aloof pages of *Queer Looks*.

He offers a series of deft, agile readings of American television and cinema, locating queer possibilities in the heart of the system. It's a book to be read for the adroitness and ingenuity of its textual analyses – sharp and telling accounts of the films of George Cukor and Dorothy Arzner, the comic personas of Jack Benny and Pee-Wee Herman, sitcoms from *I Love Lucy* to *Laverne and Shirley*. Doty is evidently happier with gathering examples and offering specific readings than with proposing a coherent queer methodology – his attempt in this direction is confused and contorted, has the flavour of having been written as an academic obligation, and all but disappears under the tidal wave of inverted commas through which budding theorists invariably pay "homage" to "post-modern" "indeterminacy". None the less, as he rightly points out, at such an early stage in up-front queer cultural studies, no single methodology could hope to be acceptable or desirable.

This is a slender volume (all the more so given that almost one-third of its pages are footnotes), and its brevity means there are limitations and absences. Since the vast majority of the examples come from comedy, it seems odd that Doty avoids a more substantial consideration of the comic transaction itself, and the entirely American bias of the material is regrettable. Also, even if one of the central tenets of queer politics has been its claim to refute the male bias of previous homosexual movements in favour of gender equality, I have reservations about a male critic who writes with such blithe certainty about the "lesbian pleasures" of texts. Perhaps I'm being too old-style gay about this, perhaps Doty is right in revelling in the excitements of new queer identification patterns which disregard conventional gender positions, but he too often asserts this view rather than convincingly arguing it. *Making Things Perfectly Queer* may not be as groundbreaking or original as it seems to think it is, but its wit, flair and insights make it visual ammunition in the fight against those who would preserve queerness as the property of unrepresentative metropolitan coteries.

Broadcasting It wasn't written to secure tenure or to grind particular theoretical axes, but it is yet more proof of publishers' new-found and highly laudable commitment to queer material. Like the rest of Cassell's excellent lesbian and gay list, it is pitched at the general reader as much as the academic or student, and as such makes no pretense of theoretical originality or activist participation. It is, however, the most important, pleasurable and political of the three books considered here. Its political importance lies in its accessibility – this, rather than *Making Things Perfectly Queer* or *Queer Looks*, is the book most queers will read. In it they will find a history that is simultaneously sobering and empowering, infuriating and enjoyable – and it is quite ridiculously enjoyable, an exhaustive survey of queer representations that pays entertaining tribute to our persistence and defiance while ruefully cataloguing our exclusions and oppressions. Its historical scope, without making a meal of the fact, underlines another key argument of queer thinking – that the homosexual world did not begin with late 60s Gay Liberation. It's a book full of pre-gay queers.

This shocking pink, homo's Halliwell



Krzysztof Kieślowski: "You make films to give people something, to transport them somewhere else"

clocks in at almost 1,000 pages, so there are bound to be mistakes (I was on *University Challenge* in 1980, Keith, not 1984). The entries on films are less than necessary, because of the other books that cover that field and the eye-opening original richness of the radio and television material, but as a labour of love and a definitive resource it can hardly be faulted. If you've ever wondered when the first lesbian kiss happened on British television, why so many gay characters are called Julian, or whether you were right as a child to suspect there was some hidden secret in Lenny the Lion's limper-than-limp paw, then this is the book you need. It shares Doty's delight in the incidental pleasures and subversive apertures of popular culture (without succumbing to his lapses into theory-victim jargon), and set beside its inclusive breadth and sheer generosity, the marginal muttering of *Queer Looks* stands revealed as the footnote that it essentially is.

Slightly excited

Philip Kemp

Kieślowski on Kieślowski

Danusia Stok (ed), Faber and Faber, £14.99, 268pp

Faber's 'Directors on Themselves' series, of which some half-dozen volumes have so far appeared, suffers from two inbuilt drawbacks. The obvious one is that some directors don't have anything interesting to say about their own films, in which case – as with David Thompson's valiant editing job on Barry Levinson – the sound of some fairly desperate barrel-scraping can be heard. The other is that, even given an articulate and perceptive subject, there's often a curiously airless feel to the books; the need

for some keen critical side-winds, for windows to open up an alternative vista or two, makes itself insidiously felt.

Such ventilation can be achieved by turning the book into an extended dialogue between film-maker and critic, as Philip French did with his excellent *Malle on Malle*. Danusia Stok likewise bases her book on long interviews with the director, but she has cut out her own questions, stitching what remains into a seamless Kieślowski monologue that traces his life chronologically. In addition, Stok tells us, excerpts from articles written by Kieślowski for a Swiss magazine have been "worked into the text" – a phrase which arouses the same twinge of misgiving as when one spots chunks of feature film footage spliced unannounced into a documentary.

Still, the result reads fluently – Stok has done a fine job of translating Kieślowski's Polish into idiomatic English without losing his personal tone of voice. So it's not her fault if, for most of its length, this book makes pretty dispiriting reading. That Kieślowski should recall the early years of his career with scant nostalgia is hardly surprising. He gives a bleak account of the subtleties, compromises and petty betrayals required of anyone trying to survive as a film-maker in Communist Poland.

But the experience, far from generating any stubborn sense of inner worth, seems to have cast a pall of disillusion over everything including himself ("I was too lazy or too stupid or both to change profession"), the business of directing ("very costly, very tiring, and gives very little satisfaction"), and film in general ("a much more primitive medium than literature"). Wearily he writes off political activity of any shade, along with his own once-hopeful generation ("We are all lost"), Poland as a whole and indeed most of the human race, concluding that he will probably never direct movies again. It's strange to realise that when these interviews were taped, Kieślowski was barely 50.

Now and again the prevailing gloom is tempered by wicked black humour, as in his memories of film school at Łódź, a city where industrial accidents were so common that the students played spot-the-mutilated: one limb missing scored one point, two missing two points, all four ten points. (The aim was to amass 15 points by breakfast.) And Kieślowski's account of his childhood yields intriguing pointers to the source of certain recurrent themes, such as the influence of the dead over the living (*No End*, *Decalogue 4*, *The Double Life of Véronique*, *Three Colours: Blue*): "My father was more important to me than my mother because he died so young." That casual "because" would repay further investigation.

It comes as a relief when the clouds start to lift some two thirds of the way through, at about the point where Kieślowski embarks on his *Decalogue* project. From here on he even guardedly confesses to liking things about his job: he gains pleasure from working with actors and cinematographers, and from the editing process – though typically he gets a masochistic kick from throwing out good scenes. Editing, in fact, is his favourite part of film-making, eliciting the nearest we are likely to get to Kieślowskian rapture: "Slightly excited. I await the results of every action on the cutting table."

Despite Kieślowski's seeming frankness, it

is hard to avoid a sense that he's holding out on us, adopting the pose of the incurably pessimistic Pole to discourage anyone from digging deeper. At one point he virtually admits as much: "I'll never tell you about the time I suffered most; nor will I tell anybody." His stated motivations as a film-maker don't give much away, either. "You make films to give people something, to transport them somewhere else." "If I have a goal, then it's to escape from literalism."

The evidence that there is rather more to Kieślowski than this lies in the films themselves – haunting, idiosyncratic and elusive. Sombre too, certainly; but (as with Bresson) capable at their darkest of giving vent to a sudden impulse of ecstasy – as in *Véronique*, when after Veronika's death in mid-concert the camera soars joyously skywards like a soul released. "Things are very rarely said straight out in my films," Kieślowski warns us. No doubt; but it's there – rather than in Stok's book, for all its merits – that insights into this enigmatic director can be found.

Scribble, scribble

Nick Roddick

The Glamour Factory:

Inside Hollywood's Big Studio System

Ronald L. Davis, Southern Methodist

University Press, \$29.95 (hb),

\$14.95 (pb), 449pp

The dust jacket of Professor Davis' splendidly glossy history of Hollywood points to a possible hidden agenda. Like all writers who have watched buyers in a bookstore, the author has ensured that the hardback version of *The Glamour Factory* hits the shops with a few ringing endorsements for prospective punters to read as they browse. He has come up with an interesting cross-section of pundits to help him, ranging from Gene Kelly and Robert Stack to the author of a couple of glossy telemovies. Perhaps not all of his A list responded.

The hidden target of these vague but ringing paeans ("Every movie buff will love it, and I think the general public will love it too," says Kelly) is, however, less bookstore browsers than teachers of film at American universities, especially those looking for a guide to the core – and often the only content – of most US college courses: Hollywood. No question, Davis' book will do that, and ensure that the students enjoy the course, too. In point of fact, though, one of the endorsements (from novelist Richard Condon) offers an unintentionally apposite comment. "This book," writes Condon, "does for the American film industry what Gibbon did for Rome."

At first sight, it is a misleadingly Cassandra-like statement: Hollywood may not be what it was, but it has declined only in terms of its appeal to nostalgia buffs and certainly has not lost its position as the dominant force in worldwide movie entertainment. But then one is reminded of the comment of a disdainful nineteenth-century aristocrat when first confronted with Gibbon's *magnum opus*: "Another big fat book, Mr Gibbon. Scribble, scribble, scribble, Mr Gibbon." I am prepared to concede that this comparison is unfair to Professor Davis. Certainly, he has produced a big, fat book. And for a first-time reader it provides a thorough and readable run-through of

Hollywood's golden age, as free from the floridly empty rhetoric of many non-academic chroniclers as it is from the jargon of contemporary media studies. It is an honest book, honestly put together. Moreover, much of it is listen, listen, listen rather than scribble, scribble, scribble: Davis' primary source is the Southern Methodist University (where he is Professor of History) Oral History collection – a wide-ranging repository of transcribed interviews with Hollywood time-servers at all levels, from producers and the surviving offspring of studio heads, to actors, writers, publicists and department heads.

And finally, technology having advanced since Gibbon, *The Glamour Factory* has a photograph at the head of each chapter (though at this price, it might have been nice if they had been printed on glossy paper rather than the ordinary paper stock of the book). But what Davis does not do is add to the specialist (or even semi-specialist) reader's knowledge of what Hollywood was and how it worked. There are a lot of words in his book, but very few of them could come under the heading of analysis. Instead, it is methodically divided up into a descending order of sections, starting with the studios themselves and working down through moguls, producers, directors and actors and actresses until it gets to design, hairstyling and make-up. The result is something around which any college professor could happily structure a ten-week semester, complete with a predetermined two-chapters-a-week reading assignment.

For other users, *The Glamour Factory* is less satisfactory. The problem with histories of Hollywood in general is that they avoid only with difficulty what one might call the gossip-column syndrome: the belief that the most tedious anecdote is rendered irresistible by the celebrity of the person involved. Take the story about Harry Warner walking with a permanent stoop because he spent the early years of his life bent over a last, working as a cobbler. If Harry Warner had been head of a corporation producing automobiles, no one would think to reproduce the story. But because he was the head of a dream factory, it achieves a spurious fascination by suggesting that he was an ordinary mortal like the rest of us. This general problem is somewhat exacerbated by Davis' reliance on taped interviews, and at times rendered maddening by his habit of cutting and pasting them together according to broad subject categories. The result is not only jerky and disconnected: it occasionally gives the illusion of information where none has been imparted.

Take the section on 20th Century Fox, to whose general structure Davis devotes two briefish paragraphs built around quotes from actors George Montgomery, Vanessa Brown and Coleen Gray. The basic point is that Fox was a friendly place where everyone knew everyone. But Gray found it otherwise, so she gets a paragraph to herself to disagree, "I never had a day without anxiety," she recalls. "One of the wardrobe women especially used to scare me to death. She scared everybody." What does that tell anyone about Fox, the studio, Hollywood, the glamour factory – or, indeed, anyone other than Coleen Gray and the anonymous harridan? In the end, Davis' painstakingly thorough assemblage of reminis-

cences – many of them fascinating in their own right – is undermined by his adoption of the BBC television documentary approach to information: assemble a number of voices and allow them to speak for themselves, in the belief that juxtaposition equals dialectic. At this stage in the history of Hollywood, we are entitled to more.

Out of the forest

Barbara Einhorn

Screen Memories: The Hungarian Cinema of Márta Mészáros

Catherine Portuges, Indiana University Press/Open University Press, £30 (hb), £12.99 (pb), 208pp

Asked why, as a director whose films centre on everyday reality, she should choose to make a film using the Red Riding Hood fairy tale, Márta Mészáros replied: "I think all my films are about girls who try to reach the other side of the forest unscathed." Mészáros herself is something of a Red Riding Hood figure in Hungarian cinema, straying from the path prescribed by those in authority in order to unearth the truth hidden deep in the impenetrable forest of official silences and untruths.

In this new study, Catherine Portuges rightly claims that Mészáros' significance has been un(der)recognised. Unusually for a woman director, her work is substantial, spanning 30 years and comprising over 100 documentaries and more than 15 features. Yet despite winning prizes at Hungarian and international festivals, her films are relatively unknown in Britain. One of the difficulties in assessing her movies lies, as Portuges points out, in the tendency for feminist film critics to claim as feminist the work of a woman director whose films all feature female leads. Since the fall of state socialism in 1989, this colonising impulse on the part of western feminists has hampered East-West dialogue on gender issues between both scholars and grass-roots activists, and has given rise to misreadings and misapprehensions.

Mészáros speaks of "a different kind of sensitivity" in films made by women, yet she resists the label 'feminist', as do most women in East Central Europe. What interests her in her female protagonists, she states, is the portrayal of "an independent woman – one who finds herself in a situation where she must make a decision on her own." Echoing Vaclav Havel, Mészáros has been concerned with "living in truth" in the midst of the hypocrisy of the state socialist period: "In everything I do, I strive for a maximum of honesty and truthfulness. All my energies are directed toward avoiding lies." Although her work has been hugely influential on other women directors, it is important to approach it on its own terms. But as she herself says, "It is a pity that films made in Eastern Europe seem of little or no interest to people in the West... for I am certain that the concerns [that we in the East feel are vital] are not ours alone but apply to the world at large, or will in the very near future."

The concerns to which Mészáros refers involve interrogating the past in order to survive the present and shape the future. In her relentless search for the truth about the Stalinist past of Eastern Europe,

Mészáros has been both courageous and groundbreaking. In the 1982 *Diary for My Children*, the protagonist Juli hears that her father, who was taken away and killed during the Stalinist purges, has been rehabilitated. In the rehabilitation office, Juli demands to be told where her father is buried. Seven years later, the Hungarian people finally reburied and honoured past president Imre Nagy, who had been interred in an anonymous grave after Soviet tanks suppressed the 1956 revolution. Mészáros comments on the film scene: "People interpreted this as my asking where Imre Nagy is buried. I didn't intend it to be so blatant, but even politicians made the association."

Despite their intricately interwoven strands of the historical and the political, Mészáros' films are deeply personal. One of the most interesting threads in Portuges' book traces the links between autobiography and film, both theoretically and in Mészáros' work: "Those qualities rejected by Stalinism – human ambiguity, the rough edges of daily life, the unsolicited promptings of memory – are in fact the very stuff of autobiography, and in particular of women's autobiography." Mészáros focuses on mother-daughter relationships, the search of mothers for daughters, and of daughters for mothers. She herself lost both her parents at an early age: her mother died in childbirth, her father, a sculptor, was taken away during the Stalinist era in the Soviet Union, where the family was then living. She depicts difficult and unhappy relationships, unfulfilled hopes and dreams acted out against the fabric of the everyday lives of working women. Always, however, the women at the centre of her stories survive the pain of living.

A recurrent image for this survival is that of a woman under the shower, enjoying the sensuality of the streaming water and the moment of private space. As Portuges writes, often this moment is "counterbalancing anguished episodes of distress resulting from the material as well as the sexual conditions of existence." Validating Mészáros' claim to women's "different... sensitivity and relationships to people, to power, to objects, to children," Portuges maintains that these scenes image the female body in a manner different from that employed by male directors – by Miklós Jancsó, for example, Mészáros' ex-husband.

Portuges shows Mészáros' work to be both ahead of its time and to resist categorisation. In the film *Adoption* (1975) she addressed the right of an older single woman to adopt a child. And as early as 1980 in *Heiresses* she dealt with the issue of surrogate motherhood, only more recently a hot topic in the West. Her films suggest that the only real closeness develops in relationships between women. Yet they also stress social differences and include the possibility of conflict as well as intimacy.

Though Portuges' work is occasionally irritating in its over-simplified references to state socialist cultural politics, or its nods to currently fashionable discourse – as in the by turns illuminating and rather forced digressions into psychoanalytic theory or post-modernist discourse analysis – it displays a depth of scholarship and breadth of research which in the main is distilled into a fascinating read. At last Mészáros is getting the attention she deserves.

Márta Mészáros: "I think all my films are about girls who try to reach the other side of the forest unscathed"



THE ACADEMY AWARDS INDEX

The Complete Categorical and Chronological Record

Compiled with an
Introduction
by
Richard Shale,

Foreword
by
Robert Wise

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Ace Ventura Pet Detective

USA 1993

Director: Tom Shadyac

Certificate

12

Distributor

Warner Bros

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Producer

James G. Robinson

Co-producers

Peter Bogart

Bob Israel

Morgan Creek

Administrator

Richard J. Kupfer

Production Controller

Todd P. Smith

Production Co-ordinators

Diane Gutterud

Louise Rosner

Unit Production Manager

Peter Bogart

Location Manager

Valerie Shields

Post-production

Supervisor

Jody Levin

Casting

Mary Jo Slater

Miami:

Ellen Jacoby Casting

Associate:

Steven Brooksbank

Assistant Directors

Terry Miller

Melanie Grefe

Michael Vigiotta

Screenplay

Jack Bernstein

Tom Shadyac

Jim Carrey

Story

Jack Bernstein

Director of Photography

Julio Macat

In colour

2nd Unit Director

of Photography

Jeff Simon

Camera Operator

Alexis I. duPont Jnr

24 Frame Computers

Howard Weiner

Video 35

Special Visual Effects

Matte World Digital

Editor

Don Zimmerman

Production Designer

William Elliott

Art Director

Alan E. Muraoka

Art Department

Co-ordinator

Tanya Hotton

Set Design

Rich Fojo

Set Decorator

Scott Jacobson

Set Dresser

Frederick W. Schwendel

Michael Calabrese

Stuart Wein

Head Scenic

Lewis Bowen Jnr

Storyboard Artist

Dan Sweetman

Special Effects

Co-ordinator

Michael N. Arbogast

Music

Ira Newborn

Music Supervisor

Peter Afterman

Music Editor

Jeff Carson

Songs

"Power of Suggestion"

by and performed by

Steve Stevens; "Line

Up" by Steven Tyler, Joe

Perry, Lenny Kravitz,

performed by Aerosmith; "Mission: Impossible" by Lalo Schiffrin; "Hammer Smashed Face" by and performed by Cannibal Corpse; "The Lion Sleeps Tonight" by George David Weiss, Hugh Peretti, Luigi Creatore, performed by Robert John; "The Crying Game" by Geoff Stephens, performed by Boy George; "Ace Is In The House" by and performed by Tone Loc

Costume Design

Bobbie Read

Wardrobe Supervisor

Emae Villalobos

Make-up Artists

Key:

Sheryl Ptak

Jay S. Cannistraci

Hair Stylists

Key:

Pauletta Lewis

Donna Greene

Pamela B. Priest

Titles/Opticals

Pacific Title

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Michael Hilkene

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Dana Porter

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Dolby stereo

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Foley Artists

Joan Rowe

Catherine Rowe

Creative Consultants

Steve Oederkerk

Eugene Lebowitz

Stunt Co-ordinator

Artie Malesci

Animal Co-ordinator

Cathy Morrison

Lead Animal Trainer

April Mackin

Cast

Jim Carrey

Ace Ventura

Courtney Cox

Melissa

Sean Young

Einhorn

Tone Loc

Emilio

Dan Marino

Himself

Noble Willingham

Riddle

Troy Evans

Podacter

Raynor Scheibe

Woodstock

Udo Kier

Camp

Frank Adonis

Vinnie

Tiny Toon

Roc

David Margulies

Doctor

John Capodice

Aguado

Judy Clayton

Martha

Bill Zechert

Mr Finkle

Alice Drummond

Mrs Finkle

Rebecca Ferratti

Sexy Woman

Mark Margolis

Shickadance

Antoni Corone

Margo Pease

John Archie

Cristina Karman

Tom Wahl

Reporters

Randall "Tex" Cobb

Gruff Man

Henry Landivar

Burnout

Florence Mistrot

Neighbour

Robert Farrell

Carlson

Will Knickerbocker

Manager

Gary Munch

Director

Terry Miller

Assistant Director

Nerbert Goldstein

Crazy Guy

Chaz Moss

Another Cop

Manuel L. Garcia

Dolphin Trainer

Dan Shula

Scott Mitchell

Peter Stojanovich

Dwight Stephenson

Jeff Ullenhake

Jeff Ullenhake

Marco Coleman

Kim Bekemper

Jeff Cross

Miami Dolphins

Chris Barnes

Alex Webster

Paul Mazurkiewicz Jr

Jack Owen

Robert Barrett

(Cannibal Corpse)

Thrasher Band

Robert Short

Douglas S. Turner

Puppeteers

7,727 feet

86 minutes

Ace Ventura, unconventional but savvy, is an expert at reclaiming lost or stolen pets. When the mascot for the Miami Dolphins football team, a dolphin called Snowflake, is mysteriously abducted a week before the Superbowl, he is called in on the case by two board members - the coach, Roger, and Melissa, a secretary. Searching the empty tank where Snowflake was kept, Ace finds a small gemstone. At first, Ace suspects a local billionaire businessman after discovering that he has recently purchased inordinate amounts of tackle and is an ardent collector of fish. As chance would have it, Melissa has been invited to the billionaire's drinks party that evening. Ace accompanies her in order to snoop around. He stumbles upon a huge tank in an outhouse, only to discover a very large shark but no Snowflake. When leaving the party, Ace notices a ring the billionaire is wearing and this provides him with his first real lead: the gemstone comes from an AFC Superbowl Championship ring.

Ace and Melissa go through photos of the Miami Superbowl team of 1984 but are interrupted by the news of Roger's apparent suicide. At the scene, Ace confounds the suicide theory and pronounces it murder, much to the chagrin of long-suffering Lieutenant Einhorn. Later, by a variety of means, Ace checks out the rings worn by mem-



Carrey on sleuthing

bers of the Superbowl squad but finds nothing.

Seemingly back at square one, Melissa shows Ace another photo taken slightly later than the rest. There is one person in this photo not present in the others - Ray Finkle, field goal kicker and the player who lost the Superbowl for the Dolphins by missing a field goal in the dying seconds of the game. Ace locates Ray's parents and discovers evidence of Finkle's dementia towards the Dolphins in general and their quarterback Dan Marino in particular. At the sanatorium where Ray was admitted, Ace finds out that Finkle has had a sex-change and has become none other than Lieutenant Einhorn.

Meanwhile, aware of Ace's progress, Einhorn has kidnapped Dan Marino and taken him to where Snowflake is being kept; but she is hotly pursued by Ace. Einhorn plans to set Ace up as the abductor but after being exposed by Ace, Einhorn is stopped and the Superbowl takes place with Snowflake waving a dorsal at the crowd.

Hot on the heels (tails?) of last year's US hit *Free Willy* comes *Ace Ventura*, which has already made more money in the States than they know what to do with. And it's easy to see why - this has sure-things hit written all over it with its winning combo of goofiness and genre send-ups. The opening scene is the funniest - our hero holds a cardboard box marked "FRAGILE" and proceeds to bash it into every shape geometry knows. (It's a ploy to nick a fussy little dog from a nasty big man in order to return it to a very appreciative owner.)

By turns screwball comedy, *Naked Gun*-style spoof and all-American feel-good movie, the film motors along frantically from implausible fortuity to impossible plot twist. But this is a film whose plot drives the set pieces, rather than vice versa. Character-wise, it's predictably thin; the female characters hardly get a look in here, dominated as the film is by Jim Carrey's performance. Courteney Cox is the gal-to-be-got while Sean Young once again disrobes, this time to be revealed as a transsexual baddie (to the strains of "The Crying Game").

As a vehicle for TV comic Jim Carrey, the movie shows him to be very much in control of a potential runaway disaster. His Ace - impressively expansive and very silly - is a sort of cross between a rockabilly (complete with blow-dried quiff) and a Jerry Lewis nerd. He manages to include just about every genre tic imaginable - hanging off the side of a skyscraper while actually standing on the ground, and entering rooms, police-style, using his hand as a gun. The heart of the humour lies in the thin line Carrey treads between belly-laughs and toe-curls, between realism and biff-bang-pow expressionism. Its generic cousins are films such as *Last Action Hero*, and in common with it, *Ace Ventura* is rather like summer in Britain: bright, breezy and instantly forgettable.

Richard Skinner

Back in the USSR

USA 1992

Director: Deran Sarafian

Certificates

15
Distributor
 Warner Bros
Production Company
 Largo International
 N.V.

In association with JVC
 Entertainment/
 Mosfilm

Executive Producer
 Louis A. Stroller

Producers
 Lindsay Smith
 Ilmar Taska

Co-producer
 James Steele

Associate Producer
 Anatoly Fradis

Production Co-ordinator
 Vitali Boguslavsky

Location Manager
 Pavel Shilov

Casting
 Jeremy Zimmerman

Supervisor:
 Vera Morozova

Assistant Directors
 Leo Zisman
 Amy Segal

Screenplay
 Lindsay Smith

Story
 Ilmar Taska
 Lindsay Smith

Director of Photography
 Yuri Neyman

Colour
 Deluxe

Camera/Stoodicum
 Operator
 Nicola Pecorini

Editor
 Ian Crafford

Associate Editor
 Pat Brennan

Production Designer
 Vladimir Philippov

Set Decorators
 Nikolai Sorotsev
 Yuri Osipenko

Special Effects
 Greg Landener
 Yuri Melchenkov

Music
 Les Hooper

Music Extracts
 "M' Appari" from
 "Martha" by Friedrich
 Flotow, performed by
 Enrico Caruso;

"Devichiy Perepoloh
 Opera" by Yu. Miliutin,
 M. Galperin, V. Tipot

Orchestrations
 William Kidd

Music Editor
 The Music Works
 Chris Ledesma

Songs
 "Back In The USSR"
 by John Lennon, Paul
 McCartney, performed by
 Alexei Zoubov,
 Sergei Latincov;

"Spacibo" by and
 performed by Tedi
 Sarafian, Rena Riffel;

"Russian Vodka"
 by and performed by
 Russian Vodka

Costume Design

Cynthia Bergstrom
Wardrobe Supervisors
 Tatyana Lichmanova
 Nina Martynova
 Natalya Chaika

Make-up Artists
 Jeff Goodwin
 Yekaterina Ivanova
 Natalya Chaika

Titles/Opticals
 Cinema Research
 Corporation

Supervising Sound Editor
 Richard L. Anderson

Dialogue Editor
 James Christopher

ADR Editors
 Jerelyn J. Harding
 Ron Davis
 L. Davies

Sound Recordists
 Gary Cunningham
 Music:

Andy Waterman
 Dolby stereo

Sound Re-recordists
 Andrea Lakin
 Sam Kaufman

Sound Re-recording Mixers
 Andy Nelson
 Steve M. Pederson
 Tom Pery

Foley Artist
 Vanessa T. Ament

WGB Liaison
 Jim Plateroti

Cast
Frank Whaley
 Archer
Natalya Negoda
 Lena

Roman Polanski
 Kurilov
Andrew Divil
 Dimitro

Boy Young
 Claudia
Ravil Isayev
 Georgi

Harry Dilson
 Whittier
Brian Blessed
 Chazov

Constantine Gregory
 Stanley
Alexei Yevdokimov
 Mikhail

Boris Romanov
 Father Peter
Vsevolod Safonov
 Ivan

Yuri Sarantsev
 Concierge
Oleg Anofriev
 Taxi Driver

Nikolai Averushkin
 Aide
Vladimir Druzhnikov
 Priest

Rita Gladushko
 Babushka
Igor Miaso
 Constantine

Fyodor Smirnov
 Evgeny Degtyarevka
 Thugs

7,844 feet
87 minutes



Tourist economy: Whaley, Negoda, Polanski

time prostitute, is upstairs with Stanley, a British black-marketeer who has taken delivery of the icon. Lena rejects Stanley's advances; he throws her out. Lena steals his bag, and Archer, captivated by her, helps her past the concierge. Archer follows her to a disco where they meet her friend Georgi. Meanwhile, Stanley is shot by Chazov, a civil servant who had expected to receive the icon. Archer visits the flat that Lena and Georgi share with Ivan, a decrepit doctor. Lena reveals her ambition to go to Paris as a fashion designer. When Archer returns to the hotel, Father Peter threatens him with the police unless the icon is returned. Archer returns to Lena's; they find the icon. Archer leaves with it, but two thieves knock him unconscious. Kurilov, a mafioso posing as a detective, and his henchman Dimitro warn Archer that he has to return the icon to them. Archer visits the US Embassy, but the attaché Whittier and his assistant Claudia are unhelpful. Archer discovers he is wanted for Stanley's murder and asks Georgi and Lena for help; Georgi takes him to Constantine, a mafia boss. The next day, Archer and Lena visit Kurilov's strip club to report their failure. Lena takes Archer to a friend's flat and they make love.

They ask Chazov, who is director of the icon registration institute, to aid their search for the Madonna, and offer to lead him to Kurilov, who is kidnapping Georgi. They both travel to Father Peter to enlist his help, but Chazov has him shot. In Moscow, Kurilov awaits their return: he shoots Archer's hand and leaves. It turns out that Lena had once worked for Kurilov. Lena finds that Archer has Stanley's cigarette lighter; he had found it in a taxi which the concierge had ordered him. They now realise that the concierge has mafia links. With Constantine's help, they retrieve the icon and meet Kurilov at the GUM shopping arcade. They intend to swap the icon for Georgi. The gangsters snatch the two lovers, taking them to a derelict factory where Georgi is. Kurilov discovers that their icon is fake. More mafia arrive and they all make their way to Chazov's house. Chazov explains that he forges icons in order to prevent the originals being smuggled abroad. Archer, sensing trouble, has hidden the cigarette lighter by a gas light, which causes the building to explode.

Lena, Georgi and Archer escape with the Madonna. Archer is to be expelled from Russia and Claudia is detailed to accompany him home. With minutes

before take-off, Lena realises that Claudia has the real icon in her case. The plane is stopped and Claudia is arrested. Archer's voice-over reveals that Georgi opens a Moscow sports shop, and Archer and Lena are to meet in Paris.

"Get out! Get out!" screams Chazov, as house and icons burst into flames around him. But it is not the lives of our young heroes or the proliferating mafia men he is concerned about. "I don't want your ashes mixed with Russian pictures!" This is the point in the film where illumination is meant to hit an audience between the eyes. Of course! So Chazov is a nationalistically-inclined lunatic with a *dacha*-industry in forged icons! Brian Blessed rumbles into a beard that, were Peter the Great still tsar, would have attracted super-tax, and all is revealed.

Well, actually, it isn't. For a thriller, this is an immensely confusing film. Loose threads of plot dangle like frayed towelling. Who tipped off Father Peter about the hotel and Stanley? How did Kurilov find out? How did Claudia get the real icon? Does Chazov also indulge in the odd bit of smuggling, and why does Ivan still wear his army uniform, 50 years after Stalingrad? A kindly reading of the film would explain such chaos as a metonymic device to describe the social, political and economic turmoil of *perestroika*-era Russia. However, as Kurilov would no doubt remind us, this is a cruel world not given to generous readings when an interpretation is easily available which involves hanging a film on a Beatles song title, Roman Polanski and Natalya Negoda.

This is very much a *perestroika* movie. Real, unchoreographed store riots occurred as Deran Sarafian shot the GUM abduction scene, and Aeroflot allowed the movie crew unprecedented access to the airport and their jets. It's corny that Georgi is equipped with a sports-shoe obsession, that the priest looks like Rasputin and that Lena wants to bootleg American blue jeans - but given the background, forgiveable.

Yet, once again, the script frustrates. Kurilov, the sleazy con with his eye on the main chance, is a role in which Roman Polanski ought normally to excel. Unfortunately, the film's pace does not give him the chance to develop a truly menacing demeanour. Negoda, whose lead in Vasili Pichul's *Little Vera* earned her international attention and proved that she possessed ability and cheekbones in equal measure, is similarly constrained. The character of Lena, an ambitious beauty who considers prostitution as a career move, is only sketched.

But *Back in the USSR* is not intended as acute character or political analysis. Through Lena it suggests that, even in the chaos and corruption of post-Soviet Russia, a sentimental virtuousness survives. Welcome, comrades, to the modern world.

Louise Gray

Beyond Bedlam

United Kingdom 1993

Director: Vadim Jean

Certificates

18
Distributor
 Feature Film Company

Production Company
 Metrodome Films

Executive Producer
 Alan Martin

Co-executive Producers
 Alec Georgiadis
 Tony Georgiadis

Producer
 Paul Brooks

Line Producers
 Tim Dennison
 Jim Groom

Associate Producer
 Simon Brooks

Production Co-ordinator
 Emma Lever

Location Manager
 Atique Hanif

Casting
 Carl Proctor

Assistant Directors
 Helen Flint
 Emily Caston
 Scott Michell Griffin

Screenplay
 Vadim Jean
 Rob Walker

Based on the book
Bedlam by Harry
 Adam Knight

Director of Photography
 Gavin Finney

Colour
 Technicolor

Camera Operators
 Chris Cheshire
 2nd Unit:

Richard Gibb
Steadicam Operator
 John Ward

Editor
 Liz Webber

Production Designer
 James Helps

Art Director
 Riette Hayes-Davies

Set Dresser
 Daisy Bodley

Illustrator
 Paul Garner

Scene Artists
 Fred Gray
 Chris Merritt

Architectural Consultant
 Paul Cayford

Special Effects Supervisor
 Gary Tunnicliffe

Special Effects
 United:
 Ian Lowe

Physical:
 Stuart Brisdon
 John van der Pool

Music
 David Hughes
 John Murphy

Music Editor
 Liz Webber

Costume Design
 Jayne Gregory

Chief Make-up Artist
 Karen Hyams

Make-up Effects
 Jacquetta
Prosthetics:
 Steve Paynter

Titles/Opticals
 Cine Image Film
 Opticals

Sound Design
 Ian Wilson
Sound Editor
 Brian Blamey

Foley Editor

Jacques Leroide
Sound Recordist
 Richard Flynn

ADR/Foley Recordists
 Mick Boggis
 Ted Swanscott

Consultant:
 Tim Partridge

Sound Re-recordist
 Clive Pendry

Sound Transfers
 Jim Archer

Foley Artists
 Jack Stew
 Dianne Greaves

Fire Technical Advisor
 Billy Davey

Stunt Co-ordinator
 Rod Woodruff

Fight Arrangers
 Craig Fairbrass
 Rod Woodruff

Armourers
 Perdic Firearms Ltd
 Mark Baker

Robert Partridge
 Derke Bremner

Cast

Craig Fairbrass
 Terry Hamilton

Elizabeth Hurley
 Stephanie Lyell

Keith Allen
 Marc Gilmour

Anika Dobson
 Judith Hamilton

Jesse Birdsell
 Scott

Craig Kelly
 Matthew Hamilton

Faith Kent
 Miss Coope

Georgina Hale
 Sister Romulus

Samantha Spiro
 WPC Foster

Stephen Brand
 Turnbull

Zoe Heyes
 Josie

Annette Badland
 Nurse Nurick

Natasha Humphrey
 Gloria

Jack McKenzie
 DCI Clerly

Chris Adamson
 Weasel

Shawn Eberton
 Rookie Cop

Andrew Rattenbury
 Fireman

Carl Proctor
 Forensic

Che Walker
 Policeman

Lucinda Galloway
 Emily Stanton

Alastair Cumming
 Peter Stanton

Jim Groom
 Geoff

Rod Woodruff
 Paul Brooks
Clevo West
 Mark Baker
 Riot Cops

8,009 feet
89 minutes

Moscow. En route from Father Peter's rural church, the Black Madonna, an invaluable icon, is stolen. Archer, a young American tourist with one night left in the city, tells his concierge he wants to see the "real Russia". Meanwhile, Lena, a nervous, first-

Detective Inspector Terry Hamilton is asked to investigate the mysterious death of a tenant, who seemingly fell through a high window after setting fire to himself. Following up the lead of other residents in the



Beyond belief: Craig Fairbrass

◀ flats, Hamilton comes across forensic psychiatrist Stephanie Lyell. Lyell, he discovers, is in charge of the care of Marc Gilmour, the so-called Bone Man, at the high-security Institute – a serial killer who held Hamilton's wife hostage, and who caused him to shoot her by mistake.

Sensing a connection, Hamilton diverts his attention to Stephanie, as does an old journalist flame of his, Josie. When three more deaths occur in the same flats (a hedonistic couple and an elderly spinster), Hamilton is convinced Gilmour is implicated. He forces Stephanie to reveal a secret Home Office experiment with the drug BFND, supposedly effective in countering sociopathic tendencies without harmful side effects. The safety of the drug has been vouchsafed for by Stephanie, who has self-injected BFND. To prove the drug's safety, Stephanie injects Hamilton with it as well. But it soon becomes clear that, far from being safe, the drug enables Gilmour to insinuate himself into a person's subconscious, allowing him to intrude into a person's dreams and exploit any repressed guilt or memories. Both Stephanie and Hamilton confront a series of real or imagined scenarios from their pasts, involving Hamilton's dead wife and Josie, who has also been killed by Gilmour. The pair eventually return to the Institute, where after a series of encounters, Hamilton finally kills Gilmour.

● Along with *White Angel* and *Deadly Advice*, *Beyond Bedlam* is one of several new British feature films taking serial killers as their subject matter. This one could easily have been called *The Silence of the REMS*. It is part of a wave of British cinema more concerned with reaping a rich box-office harvest than with critical plaudits. As such, it is doubly disappointing to have to say that the film is a profound failure, especially as its delirious, off-the-wall premise (based on a novel by Harry Adam Knight) promised such rich pickings. A drug which can reverse neuropsychiatric abnormalities, while concretising repressed elements of the unconscious, is every psychiatrist's dream and a psychoanalyst's nightmare. In essence, what the drug BFND is promising is an instant catharsis related to memories which take an eternity (and a small fortune) to tease out on the couch. At the same time,

neurochemical imbalances, which are still impervious to modern science, are miraculously cured.

If the film had pulled off this conceit – out of Cronenberg via Wes Craven – then one could have forgiven it almost anything. And there is plenty to forgive – *Beyond Bedlam* suspends its credibility so conspicuously that it verges on the nonsensical. We are asked to believe in a silk-suited forensic psychiatrist (who looks and behaves as if she was trained inside a Fabergé egg), in charge of a whole 'Institute' (courtesy of the Department of Health and the Home Office). She is working on a sociopathic murderer, using a drug which has bypassed all pharmaceutical safety regulations by virtue of having been used by the scientist herself.

It's the sort of tall tale which requires the imaginative leaps of a Larry Cohen to sustain its passage for 90 minutes. Unfortunately, it soon becomes clear that director Vadim Jean – half of the *Leon the Pig Farmer* team – is creatively stranded between an unreal comedy (Anita Dobson reprises not so much the role of Angie in *EastEnders*, as a single line of hers – "I'll make us all a nice cup of tea") and frivolous pathos (Stephanie turns out to be a Catholic who had an abortion). As co-writer with Rob Walker, Jean also has to share the blame for the cardinal sin of revealing, 15 minutes before the end, that the Bone Man can't actively harm anybody within the dream, unless it is self-inflicted – a crucial change from Freddy Krueger, who never allowed his victims this clear-eyed slice of rationalisation.

Once it becomes clear that only guilt or remorse can damage your health, *Beyond Bedlam* eschews any further cerebral commitment from its protagonists, and proceeds with a series of raw, insistently muscular (and in view of Elizabeth Hurley's non-contribution at this point, extremely sexist) encounters between Keith Allen (all gleaming scalp and eyeballs) and Craig Fairbrass. The latter has been primed for this confrontation by a series of earlier shots, showing off his hypertrophied, Stallone-like torso, either working out or jogging in the park. It remains to be seen whether this is an ingenious marketing ploy to release edited highlights of *Beyond Bedlam* as a workout video, once the Bone Man computer game has been patented.

Farrak Anwar

Deadly Advice

United Kingdom 1993

Director: Mandie Fletcher

Certificate

15

Distributor

Mayfair Entertainment

Production Company

Zenith

Producer

Nigel Stafford-Clark

Associate Producer

Charles Salmon

Production Co-ordinator

Janine Lodge

Location Managers

Robert Jordan

Jonathan Wicks

Post-production

Co-ordinator

Harriet Fenner

Assistant Directors

Melanie Dicks

Robert Fabbri

William Booker

Screenplay

Glenn Chandler

Director of Photography

Richard Greatrex

Colour

Eastman

Camera Operator

Jim Alloway

Editor

John Jarvis

Production Designer

Christopher Hobbs

Art Director

Michael Buchanan

Set Dresser

Neesh Ruben

Special Effects Chiefs

Dave Beavis

Arthur Beavis

Ken Lailey

Music

Richard Harvey

Music Consultants

David Minns

Margaret Wood

Songs

"For Your Love" by

Graham Gouldman,

performed by The

Yardbirds; "I Only

Want To Be With You"

by Mike Hawker, Ivor

Raymond, performed

by Dusty Springfield;

"Let the Heartaches

Begin" by Tony

Macaulay, John

Macleod, performed

by Long John Baldry;

"Bunny's Strip" by Hal

Lindes, performed by

Hal Lindes, Phil Todd,

The Optical Orchestra

Choreography

Nicky Hinkley

Costume Design

Emma Porteous

Wardrobe Supervisor

Cynthia Dowling

Make-up

Chief:

Aileen Seaton

Make-up/Hair

Robert McCann

Sian Grigg

Main Title Design

Plume Partners

Title Design

Chris Allies

Titles

Peerless Camera

Company

Opticals

Peerless Camera

Company

General Screen

Enterprises

Sound Editors

Rick Dunford

Dialogue:

Mike Crouch

Sound Recordists

Mark Holding

Music Engineer:

Austin Ince

Dolby stereo

Sound Re-recordist

Hugh Strain

Stunt Co-ordinator

Tracey Eddon

Cast

Jane Horrocks

Jodie Greenwood

Brenda Fricker

Iris Greenwood

Imelda Staunton

Beth Greenwood

Jonathan Pryce

Dr Ted Phillips

Edward Woodward

Major Herbert

Armstrong

Billy Whitelaw

Kate Webster

Hywel Bennett

Dr Crippen

Jonathan Hyde

George Joseph Smith

Sir John Mills

Jack the Ripper

Ian Abber

Bunny

Eleanor Bron

Judge

Roger Frost

Reverend Horace

Cotton

Gareth Gwyn-Jones

Mr Smethurst

Richard Moore

Constable Dickman

Allison Burrows

Joyce Cream

Sarah Blackburn

Veronica

Alan Fordham

Comper

Dillon Keane

Mary

Benedict Bates

Michael

Elinor Blakeley

Young Jodie

Robert Hickson

Jodie's Dad

Andrew Watson

Farmer

Sue Jones-Davies

Waitress

Craig Edwards

Young Constable

8,161 feet

91 minutes

● Hay-on-Wye. Iris, a middle-aged widow, rules the lives of her two daughters Jodie and Beth with an iron hand. In particular, Jodie is discouraged from associating with Ted, the local doctor. Meanwhile, Beth is allowed to attend a hen party, where she falls for Bunny, a male stripper.

Jodie begins to see the figure of Major Armstrong, a local murderer who poisoned his wife and was hanged for his crime. The Major encourages

Jodie to kill her mother. Jodie is then visited by Dr Crippen and the Victorian axe murderer Kate Webster; on her advice, Jodie kills Iris with an axe. Jodie is forced to confide in Beth, whose help she needs to dispose of the body. On Crippen's advice, the sisters get rid of Iris in the middle of a lake. Beth invites Bunny to move in, and Jodie begins to see more of Ted. Meanwhile the locals are told that Iris has gone to visit an aunt in Rhyll.

With Bunny paying more attention to Jodie, an increasingly jealous Beth begins to threaten blackmail if her sister does not toe the line. Jodie begins to have flashbacks which reveal that her father may have committed suicide. When the local vicar starts enquiring after her mother, and another murderer (George J. Smith, who drowned three of his wives) arrives to give advice, Jodie determines to kill the asthmatic Beth by sabotaging her inhalers with cat fur. The ploy works, but when Bunny discovers the fur, she stabs him with a pair of scissors, encouraged by Jack the Ripper (the only killer among her advisers never to be caught).

In the ensuing trial, with Ted as a witness, Jodie persuades the jury that she killed Bunny in self-defence, and is acquitted. Free to marry Ted, Jodie has a flashback on her honeymoon night to her father's death; as a child, she had pushed him over a balcony after discovering him in bed with another woman. When Ted reveals that he knows Jodie killed her mother, she is relieved to find Jack the Ripper is still on hand to advise her...

● After the living dead come the talking dead. In *Deadly Advice*, that epithet could just as well apply to the familiar television names gracing the cast, as it does to the motley collection of costumed murderers who turn up sporadically to encourage Jodie to commit her fatal misdeeds. Directed by Mandie Fletcher, a name associated with *Blackadder*, one of the few genuinely funny television sitcom series, *Deadly Advice* is a miscalculated shot at regaining the mordantly comic ground mapped out by films like *The Lodger* and *Kind Hearts and Coronets*.

However, *Deadly Advice's* characters are so familiar that it would have needed a hybrid of Hamer and Hitchcock to pull off the film's narrative conceits. There's Brenda Fricker as a matriarch with a sandbag verbal punch; Jane Horrocks as a daffy, dreamy oddball; Imelda Staunton as an overweight, repressed sexpot; and Jonathan Pryce as, well, Jonathan Pryce. Even Hitchcock might have struggled to get laughs out of serial killings so soon after the national soul-searching caused by the James Bulger trial, not to mention the discovery of various graves in Gloucester. The fact that the film does not include any references to the Yorkshire Ripper or Dennis Nielsen is understandable on one level, but it also illustrates the film-makers' lack of ambition and insight into the full implications of their ideas.

By focusing attention on the real-life killer Major Armstrong, who lived in Hay-on-Wye, the film gives us every reason to expect an exploration of actions in relation to the place they occur in. Just what is it about the town's way of life which induces homicidal impulses? Coincidentally, the film's release has been preceded by a strong television dramatisation of the Major's life, *Dandelion Dead*, directed by Mike Hodges. Hodges' film, astutely scripted by Michael Chaplin, drew a convincing picture of a community on the cusp of post-war changes. With Victorian hypocrisy giving way to Edwardian thrift, and the social landscape being transferred from the military and the landed gentry to bank managers and estate agents, the bluff old Major (who avoided any action in the Great War) was seen as a hedonist, mesmerised by the materialistic whirl of class changes and increasing sexual emancipation, but held back by the stagnant snobbery of his spouse. Hence the arsenic and the trip to the gallows.

Two generations on and the Hay-on-Wye of *Deadly Advice* is a hodge-podge of sexual repression and Enid Blyton cuteness, where butchers wear straw hats and striped aprons and wave cheerio outside their shops. Only the car number plates pin the film to the present. Otherwise its look and the characters' behaviour could just as easily be from 20 years ago. So although Iris clearly resents her daughters' sexual/social liaisons, there is nothing to suggest an etiology in the 'back-to-basics' community values the film fleetingly alludes to (another missed opportunity). Nor does the spurious psychoanalytical denouement, which reveals why Jodie is so comfortable with murder, provide enough meat to accommodate her mother's prurient aggression.

Without logic or wit to bolster its themes, *Deadly Advice* has nowhere to go other than through a few visual set pieces (the boat journey with Iris's body under the full moon, the meteorological menace as Jodie's deadly intentions begin to set in), and a scenario which piles even more murders of yesteryear into Jodie's hallucinations. Each one comes laden with a considerable ham factor, allowing a comfortable theatrical distance between Jodie's impulsive destructiveness and the sociopathology of serial slaying.

Ironically, while the film aspires to big screen production values and financial success, almost anything which could have proved distinctive or cinematically risky has been squeezed out, in favour of broad comedy and a collection of grotesque, *Friday the 13th*-type murders (the only elements in the film which might have been difficult to justify on the small screen). The fact that the film's most repugnant moment is not Fricker getting an axe in the head, or Staunton wheezing agonisingly with asthma, but the same actress shaving her legs, summarises adequately just how wide of the target *Deadly Advice* eventually strays.

Farran Anwar

Fearless

USA 1993

Director: Peter Weir

Certificate
15

Distributor
Warner Bros

Production Company
Warner Bros presents
A Spring Creek
production

Producers
Paula Weinstein
Mark Rosenberg
Co-producers
Robin Forman
William Beasley

Associate Producers
Christine A. Johnston
Alan B. Curtiss
Production Associate
Craig Dietrich
Production Manager
William S. Beasley
Location Managers
LA:

Robert Decler
San Francisco:
Rory Enke

**Post-production
Supervisor**

Rosemary Dority
2nd Unit Director
William S. Beasley

Casting
Howard Feuer
Assistant Directors
Alan B. Curtiss
John Rusk

Robert Huberman
Screenplay
Rafael Yglesias

Based on his novel
Director of Photography
Allen Daviau

Colour
Technicolor
**2nd Unit Director
of Photography**
Tom Cannole

Aerial Photography
R. Stanton McLain
Camera Operators
Paul C. Babin

Visual Effects:
John Mesa
Steadicam Operator
Larry McConkey

Special Visual Effects
Introvision
International
Supervisor:

William Mesa
Producers:
Andrew Naud
Abra Grupp

Technical Supervisor:
Nick Davis
Art Department:
Charles Wood

Editor
William Anderson
Production Designer
John Stoddart

Art Director
Chris Burian-Mohr
Art Department

Co-ordinator
Suzanne Peck
Set Decorator
John Anderson

Illustrator
David Negron Jr
Special Design Consultant
Wendy Sites

Special Effects
Co-ordinator
Ken Pepiot

Special Effects
Al Delgado
Gintar Repecka

Peter Albiez
Robert L. Olmstead
Gary L. Karas

Kelly Kirby
Music/Music Conducted by
Maurice Jarre

Music Extracts
"Lento sostenuto
tranquillo ma
cantabile" (from

"Symphony No. 3 -
Symphony of
Sorrowful Songs") by
Henryk Gorecki,
performed by Dawn
Upshaw, London
Sinfonietta; "Concerto
No. 5 in E flat for Piano
and Orchestra" by
Ludwig van Beethoven,
performed by Vladimir
Ashkenazy, The Vienna
Philharmonic
Orchestra

Music Editor
Dan Carlin
Songs

"Mai Nozipo" by
Dumisani Maraire,
performed by Kronos
Quartet, Dumisani
Maraire; "Where the
Streets Have No Name"
by Adam Clayton,
Paul David Hewson,
Laurence Mullen,
David Evans,

performed by U2; "Sin
ella" by and performed
by Gipsy Kings;
"Christmas Festival";
"Polymorphia" by
Krzysztof

Penderecki; "Jo's Song"
by Josephine Hinds
Costume Design
Marilyn Matthews
Costume Supervisor
Elaine Maser

Make-up Artist
Ed Henriques
Hair stylist
Bette Iverson

Title Design
Nina Saxon Film
Design
Titles/Opticals
Pacific Title

Sound Design
Lee Smith
Dialogue Editors
Jeanine Chialvo

Annabelle Sheehan
Karin Whittington
ADR Editor
Livia Ruzic

Sound Recordists
Charles Wilborn
Music:
Shawn Murphy
Dolby stereo

Foley Recordist
Steve Burgess
Sound Re-recorder
Phil Judd

Sound Effects Editors
Peter Townend
Wayne Pashley
Foley Artist
Gerry Long

**Disaster/Rescue
Consultant**
Gordon Black
Stunt Co-ordinator
Chris Howell

Cast
Jeff Bridges
Max Klein
Isabella Rossellini

Laura Klein
Rosalie Peraz
Carla Rodrigo

Tom Hulse
Brillstein
John Tartar

Dr Bill Perlman
Gianico Del Toro
Manny Rodrigo

Dwaine O'Connell
Nan Gordon
John De Lancie

Jeff Gordon
Spencer Vrooman
Jonah Klein

Daniel Corry
Byron Hummel

Evo Roberts
Gail Klein
Robin Pearson-Rose

Sarah
Debra Monk
Alison
Cynthia Mace

Cindy Dickens
Randie Hill
Peter Hummel

Kathryn Rossiter
Jennifer Hummel
Craig Rovere

Doug Ballard
FBI Agents
Molly Cleator

IHOP Waitress
Rance Howard
Bald Cabbie

Schylar Ghoslon
Sam Gordon
Trevor Ghoslon

Benjamin Gordon
Anne Kerry Ford
Baby's Mother

Michael Mulholland
Red Cross Volunteer
CMI Gopher Jnr

Paramedic
Sally Murphy
Jackie

Steven Culp
Emergency Doctor
John Towey

Wilkinson
Stephanie Erb
Lisa

Cordis Heard
Jana Smith
Donna Keegan

Tricia Brittenham
Linda Lee
Daryl Hemmerich

Flight Attendants
Paul Gheringhoff
Joe Paulino

Reporters
Ryan Tomlinson
Jonah's Friend

Eric Moynik
Sears Salesman
Don Amendolia

Ronni Reed
Survivors
Elsa Raven

Grey-haired Woman
William Newman
Elderly Man

Jeanine Jackson
Redhead
Don Beighton

Middle-aged Man
David Carpenter
Young Man in Group

Rome Owens
"Bubble" Rodrigo
Kevin Brophy

TV Reporter
Michael Ching
Doorman

Roger Hernandez
Priest
Anatolito Poragino

Laura's Sister
Ramocita Hernandez
Abuela

Isabel R. Martinez
Tia
I. Rodrigo Martinez

Tio
Mel Gabrel
Reflecting Can Hobo

Gerard L. Kersey
Pilot
Randy Denakas

Co-pilot
Gene DeAngellis
Intercity Captain

Danielle Clogg
Young Survivor
Joan Murphy

Ice Cream Man
Shannon Ratigan
Harassed Husband

Adelaide M. Wolf
Harassed Wife
Lloyd Catlett

Texan
Rebecca Hardt
Ballet Student

Suzanne Q. Bardeau
Danielle's Mother
Marie Bombonik

Jackie's Sister
Richard Blinn
Ashley Como

Norman Fessler
Eric's Rasmussen
Ken Morbitz

James E. Flannigan
LaVina Wilkerson
Passengers

10,960 feet
122 minutes

Max Klein, a San Francisco architect, is flying to Houston with his friend and partner Jeff Gordon, when their plane crashes into a cornfield outside Bakersfield. Just before the crash, Max, hitherto terrified of flying, experiences a feeling of peace and total lack of fear. Jeff is killed but Max survives unscathed. He rescues a baby and a young boy, Byron, from the wreck, and leads other passengers to safety. Still in a beatific state, he makes his way to a motel, hires a car, and looks up an old flame; while with her he happily eats a bowl of strawberries, to which he used to be allergic. Not until the FBI trace him does he think to contact his wife, Laura.

Max is publicly hailed as a hero, but during the subsequent weeks he seems locked off in a world of his own where Laura is unable to reach him. As if believing himself invulnerable, he walks through speeding traffic and balances perilously on high parapets. His detached attitude frustrates both Brillstein, a lawyer eager to win damages for the Kleins and for Jeff's widow Nan, and Dr Perlman, a psychiatrist counselling the crash survivors. Hoping to elicit some response, Perlman introduces Max to Carla Rodrigo, a young woman whose two-year-old son died in the crash, and who is devastated by grief and guilt.

Max and Carla establish a close, though platonic, friendship. Helping her come to terms with her son's death, he finally exorcises her guilt by driving full tilt into a wall to prove the impact must inevitably have wrenched the child from her arms. Both Max and Carla are injured, but not seriously. His sense of immortality enhanced, Max becomes even more remote from Laura, who resents his relationship with Carla. Brillstein shows up, ecstatic over the huge damages he hopes to secure. Listening to him, Max deliberately chokes himself on a strawberry, and finds himself back in the wrecked fuselage, walking peacefully towards a bright light. At the last moment he hears Laura's voice begging him not to die, and returns to life.

The conventions of the air-disaster movie are well established. First we're introduced to a stock company of passengers and crew (nervous old lady, pompous businessman, etc.), then they're all herded on to a plane marked 'Destination: Catastrophe'. *Fearless*, living up to its title, jettisons this whole weary scenario. Instead, it plunges us straight into the aftermath of a crash, with Jeff Bridges wandering out of a cornfield into a scorched-earth desolation of shattered fuselage, burst luggage and dismembered human fragments. (This film, it's fair to bet, is unlikely to do great business on the in-flight movie circuit.)

The uncompromising opening is typical of a film which rarely takes the expected route or the easy option. Its central crux - the liberating epiphany experienced by Max Klein in the last moments before the crash - is never explained, still less explained away. Peter Weir and Rafael Yglesias (scripting from his own novel) offer us various hints, but in the end what's happened to Max remains as enigmatic as what became of the vanished schoolgirls in Weir's first hit, *Picnic at Hanging Rock*. It's refreshing to see a mainstream Hollywood film that so resolutely refuses to manipulate its audience, but rather invites us to watch and reflect and make up our own minds.

The metaphysical dimension is neither endorsed nor ruled out. Sometimes Max seems to be conducting a feud with a vindictive deity ("You want to kill me, but you can't!" he yells triumphantly at the sky, having walked unscathed through hurtling traffic), at other times he comes close to setting up in competition. "So there's no god, but there's you?" Carla asks half-jokingly when he expounds his ideas, and taking a shower soon after the crash he thoughtfully fingers a small, stigmata-like wound in his left side. In a diner he gazes enraptured at a waitress's name-tag inscribed 'Faith', but whether he's found faith, and in what (himself, or some outside principle?) is left undefined.

The one certainty is that Max has freed himself from his previous phobic, inhibited self. "I can't get back. I don't want to," he tells Laura. But where a more glib film might pre- ▶



Indestructible: Jeff Bridges

◀ sent this as pure gain, a man liberated to "live life to the full", *Fearless* makes clear that in many ways Max (played by Jeff Bridges with something of the same disquieting ambiguity, at once affable and remote, that he brought to the alien in John Carpenter's *Starman*) has become a lesser human being. The young boy, Byron, may see him as a hero and second father, and Carla feel "it's like God sent him to me" - but to his wife and son he's a monster of selfishness, blandly shutting off the pain he's causing them. He talks of feeling more alive than ever, but part of him - a good part, in both senses - has died.

Another reading of the film, of course, would be that Max has in fact died in the crash, and that everything bar the flashbacks is his moment-of-death experience. "We're safe because we died already," he assures Carla, and on his drawing board Laura finds a series of mysterious vortices that resolve themselves into two celestial images: Doré's depiction of the heavenly host from Dante's *Paradiso*, and Bosch's 'Ascent into the Empyrean'. These images are echoed in the final scene, where the dying Max finds himself walking through the tunnel of the fuselage towards a brilliant light. Here as in *The Last Wave* (which offered its own unorthodox take on death and visions), Weir taps into mystic levels.

If religion gets sceptical treatment in *Fearless*, the same goes for the secular alternatives. At one point Dr Perlman (subtly portrayed by John Turturro as a man hamstrung by his own sense of inadequacy) stages a group therapy session for the crash survivors. Far from offering us reassuring scenes of traumas being sobbed out on supportive shoulders, the session degenerates into an agonised mess, with angry accusations tearing the group apart and leaving everyone in a worse state than before. Facile comfort, once again, is not on offer.

The film sounds only one false note, when in its final moments Max is brought back to life. Dramatically and emotionally it would work far better if he died, and the last-ditch reprieve smacks of a loss of nerve on somebody's part. That apart, though, *Fearless* strikes audaciously out on its own individual track, and it's a melancholy thought that it will probably fare far worse at the box-office than Weir's meretricious crowd-pleasers like *Green Card* and *Dead Poets Society*.

Philip Kemp

Germinal

France/Belgium/Italy 1993

Director: Claude Berri

Certificate

15

Distributor

Guild

Production Company

Renn productions
In association with
France 2 Cinéma
D.D. productions
Alternative Films
Nuova Artisti Associati
With financial assistance from
La Région Nord/Pas-de-Calais
Ministère de la Culture et de la Francophonie
Centre National de la Cinématographie
Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale
Sofarp/Investimage 2
Canal +
Groupe Pinault
Executive Producer
Pierre Grunstein
Producer
Claude Berri
Associate Producer
Bodo Scriba
Production Manager
Patrick Bordier
Unit Managers
Marc Vade
Francis Barrois
Pascal Richez
Thierry Cretagne
Nicolas Borowsky
Nicolas Davy
Nicolas Servent
Pierre Choumeurthe
Luc Tramon
Laurent Chiomento
Thierry Hardy
Claire-Marie Cuvilly
Location Managers
Jean-René Coulon
Thierry Gollin
Patrick Schmitt
Costing
Gérard Moulévrier
Assistant Directors
Frédéric Auburtin
Eric Bartonio
Natalie Engelstein
Agnès Bertola
Jérôme Elkouri
Danielle Charles
Screenplay
Claude Berri
Arlette Langmann
Based on the novel by Emile Zola
Director of Photography
Yves Angelo
Panavision
In colour
Steadicam Operator
Marc Koninck
Special Visual Effects
Magic Camera
Company
Derek Meddings
Supervisor:
Frédéric Moreau
Art Director:
José Granell
Camera:
Paul Wilson
Editor
Hervé de Luze
Production Designers
Thanh At Hoang
Christian Marti
Special Effects
Jean-Pierre Maricourt
Philippe Sylvain
Christophe Messaoudi
Music
Jean-Louis Roques
Music Director
Jean-Claude Casadesus
Music Performed by
Orchestre National de Lille
Music Arrangements
Bernard Gérard

Choreography

Nicole Delhayes

Costume Design

Sylvie Gautrelet
Caroline de Vivaive
Bernadette Villard
Make-up Artists
Joël Lavau
Nathalie Louichon
Special Make-up Effects
Dominique Colladant
Reiko Kruk
Makrtylists
Pierre Vade
Isabelle Luzet
Dialogue Editor
Jacqueline Mariani
Sound Recordists
Pierre Gamet
Dominique Hennequin
Michel Kiochender
Dolby stereo
Sound Re-recorderists
Jacques Lévy
Marion Lorthioir
Jean-Louis Lebras
Sound Effects
Pascal Chauvin
Pascal Dedeys
Foley Artists
Nicolas Becker
Jean-Noël Yven

Cast
Renard
Etienne Lantier
Gérard Depardieu
Maheu
Mico-Mico
Maheude
Jean Carmet
Bonnemort
(Vincent Maheu)
Judith Henry
Catherine Maheu
Jean-Roger Milo
Chaval
Lourenç Torzoff
Souvarine
Jean-Pierre Bonna
Rasseneur
Bernard Fresson
Deneulin
Jacques Decamine
Monsieur Hennebeau
Amny Dupuy
Madame Hennebeau
Pierre Lafont
Monsieur Grégoire
Amik Alano
Madame Grégoire
Frédéric van den Driessche
Paul Négrel
Gérard Croce
Maigrat
Thierry Lavarot
Zacharie Maheu
Albano Casotto
Jeanlin Maheu
Séverine Huan
Alzire Maheu
Jessica Sauer
Lénore Maheu
Mathieu Mathez
Henri Maheu
Alexandra Laskoff
Maxime
Valonde Moreau
La Levaque
Georges Sicaquet
Levaque
Sabrina Delavertiere
Philomène
Maximilien Rogioni
Pierron
José Polik
Bébert
Anno-Marie Pizani
La Mouquette
André Julien
Mouque
Vivette Polik
Veuve Désir
Solomi Jarrion
Madame Rasseneur
Fred Perronne
Pluchart

Cécile Bois

Cécile Grégoire
Delphine Quentin
Lucie Deneulin
Alexandrine Laub
Jeanne Deneulin
Fred Ulysse
Dansaert
Frédérique Rachand
Honorine
Maryse Moutier
Mélanie
Jenny Clève
Rose
Nathalie Hoquet
Amélie

Bruno Tichauer

Captain of the Guards
Fernand Klotz
Company Secretary
André Chassemeau
Company Cashier
Philippe Desbois
Doctor

14,232 feet

158 minutes

Subtitles

◉ Northern France, during the Second Empire. Etienne Lantier, a machinist, seeks work at the immense Voreux coal mine, and is taken on in place of a woman miner who has just died. His team leader is Maheu, the father of seven children who all work (or will work) in the pit. His wife Maheude asks for food and clothing from the wealthy Grégoire family, the mine's principal shareholders, whose daughter Cécile is to be married to Négrel, the nephew of Hennebeau, the mining company's general manager. The family give Maheude clothing but refuse her food, forcing her to extend her credit with the sexually blackmailing shopkeeper Maigrat.

Etienne, a self-taught socialist, is horrified at the conditions in which the miners live and work. These threaten to become even worse when management, after an accident, talk of imposing a change in the method of calculating workers' pay. Etienne finds himself attracted to the Maheus' daughter, Catherine, who is also being courted by the boorish Chaval; this attraction increases when Etienne moves in with the family. He sets about organising a strike fund, and shortly afterwards the workers, at a mass meeting, decide to go on strike. Hennebeau refuses to negotiate with them, agonised by his discovery that his wife has been having an affair with Négrel.

The nearby Jean-Bart mine is still working, and Catherine joins Chaval (with whom she is now living) in working there, to the disgust of her family. Men and women alike march on the scab pit, which is shut down when Maheu opens the steam valves that provide its power; his daughter and her lover are among the miners who

climb out and run the gauntlet of their old workmates. Maigrat climbs onto his roof for safety, falls to his death, and is jubilantly castrated by the women.

When the miners march on the Voreux, they are met by soldiers who open fire at random, killing among others Maheu and the young woman miner Mouquette. The strike is taking its toll and talk begins of a return to work. Etienne's Russian anarchist friend Souvarine warns him against going back down the pit, but, prompted by tender feelings for Catherine, who has been thrown out by Chaval, he joins her in a return to work. Souvarine has sabotaged the mine, which is flooded; Catherine, Etienne and Chaval are trapped underground together, and Etienne kills his rival in a fight. Catherine dies in his arms, not before their true feelings for each other have been recognised.

Meanwhile, Maheu's father, the old, now retired and almost catatonic miner Bonnemort, has strangled Cécile who has come on a charity visit. Etienne is rescued from the pit, and finds Maheude - the staunchest of the strikers - getting ready to go back to work. She wishes him well; he leaves in the April sunshine, reflecting on how seeds are growing underground which will grow stronger and flourish like the miners' struggles to secure a better life and a more just society.

◉ *Germinal* is inescapably a film of its time, because of the period setting rather than in spite of it. The most expensive French film ever (with a budget of more than 160 million francs, and a set that took seven months to build on location near Valenciennes), it stands - and will, I suspect, do so increasingly with time - as a monument to the end of the Mitterrand years and the vicissitudes, in France and worldwide, of socialism during that period. Gérard Depardieu is a well-known admirer of the President, who earned much criticism for making a special journey to Lille for the film's premiere on board a high-speed train on which a fabulously expensive champagne buffet was served. The film was excoriated by Gérard Lefort in *Libération* - erstwhile



Trouble down pit: Gérard Depardieu

Maoist broadsheet, now effectively the house daily of the designer social-democratic Left in France – for its “Soviet hue” and theme-park presentation of the working class, whose very textural realism he sees as confining it to an unthreateningly distant past.

This reviewer was not so sure: a year (more or less) to the day before seeing *Germinal* for the first time in Paris, I had been marching through London in support of real-life British miners, and my first response on seeing the film was that for them at least it had come just too late. Claude Berri has given us a lavish socialist-realist canvas, taking over aesthetically where the French Left has come to a halt politically, so that the film in a sense enacts the eclipsing of the more narrowly political by the cultural that has been a major legacy of the Mitterrand years. He remains faithful to the extraordinary visual richness of Zola's text, though inevitably the bi-gendered charge of the Voreux pit, at once phallic and castratory, loses in ‘translation’ (Maheu's assertion that he “loves his pit” hardly does as a replacement). It is also puzzling that Berri chose to bowdlerise the sequence in which Mouquette ‘moons’ the soldiery by having her keep on her bloomers – the more so as the film has a self-consciously painterly quality that often evokes artists of the bawdy, such as Breughel. Rembrandt, Caravaggio, Monet are all likewise at different times brought to mind, notably in the ‘set-pieces’ of the Voreux, whose epic sweep is at the opposite pole to, say, Godard's alienatory and deconstructionist use of painting.

Budget and spectacle rather overshadow the performances. The singer Renaud seems somewhat overawed in his first screen role, while Depardieu is exactly as one might have expected (unless one had taken note of Zola's description of Maheu as “petit”, surely the film's major departure from the literary text). The women, on the whole, upstage the men: Judith Henry, hitherto unknown to British audiences, carries a convincing (and disturbing) undernourished sensuality as Catherine, and Miou-Miou's Maheude – compared by the actress herself to Mother Courage – may well be the performance of her career. Jean-Roger Milo, finally, gives Chaval a savage, almost deranged sneering quality reminiscent of Robert Le Vigan, who played the suicidal painter in Carné's *Quai des Brumes* and the actor in Renoir's *Les Bas-Fonds* before fleeing France for his life at the Liberation. Chaval's ‘collaboration’ with the employers thus acquires troublingly wider overtones.

Germinal, then, succeeds where the French Communist Party has failed (*mutatis mutandis*, the same might be said for *Les Visiteurs* and Eurodisney). Even for audiences unfamiliar with current developments in France, however, it offers a full-blooded committed spectacle unlike anything in British cinema, and for that alone deserves to do well.

Keith Reader

Le Journal de Lady M (The Diary of Lady M)

Switzerland/Belgium/Spain/France 1992

Director: Alain Tanner

Certificate

18

Distributor

Mainline

Production Companies

Filmograph

(Geneva)/Nomad Films

(Brussels)/Messidor

Films (Barcelona)/

Les Productions

Lazennec (Paris)

With financial

assistance from

Télévision Suisse

Romande

Canal + Spain

Pandora Films

Executive Producer

Gérard Ruey

Producers

Alain Tanner

Jacques de Clercq

Dimitri de Clercq

Gerardo Herrero

Marta Esteban

Christophe Rossignon

Production Managers

Jean-Pierre Fayère

Catalonia:

Blanca Zaragoza

Assistant Directors

Mathieu Amalric

Brussels:

Donato Rotunno

Screenplay

Myriam Mézières

Director of Photography

Denis Jutzeler

In colour

Camera Operator

Joaquim Torres

Editor

Monica Goux

Art Directors

Catalonia:

Jordi Canora

Brussels:

Alain Chennaux

Set Designer

Anne Rucki

Mariah Walker-Nelson

Music

Arié Dzierlatka

Songs

“Encore une fois”

by Destroy Man,

performed by Myriam

Mézières: “Love” by

Waziz Diop, Myriam

Mézières, Lee

Maclaren: “La Femme

sans âme” by Frédéric

Acquaviva, Myriam

Mézières: “Donna'm

amor” by Josep M.

Bardagi, Francese

Pi de la Serra

Costume Design

Laurent Mercier

Make-up

Maité Campos

Anne Rucki

Hair stylist

Kent Angot

Sound Editor

Alain Garnier

Sound Recordists

Henri Malkoff

André Naudin

Hans Kuenzi

Cast

Myriam Mézières

M

Juanjo Puigcorbó

Diego

Félicité Wonnac

Nuria

Nanon

Marie Poyruoc-Yamou

Clayda Gombie

Members of Lady M

Antoine Bester

Man in Kismet Club

Malada

Billie

Albert Plasson

Night Porter

Roger Mondri

Brawler

Carole Soldevilla

Woman of 35

Olivier Coysseon

Little Boy

10,097 feet

112 minutes

Diego's wife, Nuria, and daughter, Billie. In answer to M's stunned questions, Diego muses that “life is complicated” and says he has told Nuria about M. After making love once more, M insists they part. But once back in Paris, she is listless without Diego; in a telegram, she tells him she can't live without him and begs him to join her – bringing Nuria and Billie if he wants.

Two weeks later, Diego, Nuria and Billie arrive, and M, nervously playing hostess, sets up her lounge as a bedroom for the family. The reserved Nuria's response to M is unfathomable, but the two women gingerly become friends. Diego pleasures M on the stairs one day while Nuria is out. Diego, Nuria and Billie come to watch M rehearsing; as they walk home by the Seine, she questions Diego's assumption that he knows his wife well. That night, M walks in on Diego and Nuria as they kiss passionately and is incorporated into their love-making, each woman watching as Diego has sex with the other. Finding the family asleep together naked the next night, M chooses to sleep at the club. In the morning, she picks a row with Nuria, who slaps her, and finally lets loose her pain at Diego's infidelity, but then makes love to M standing up in the kitchen.

The two women's intimacy continues happily, and Diego, feeling redundant, returns to Barcelona alone. M wants to take Nuria and Billie with her on a European tour, but Nuria, heartbroken, says she cannot travel from hotel to hotel with a baby, and they part. Six months later, M returns to Barcelona in search of the two people who mean so much to her, but the woman who answers the door at their former address says she has never heard of them. M's voice-over tells us that some time later she received a letter from Diego saying he had gone to Latin America and married a Venezuelan; she never heard from Nuria again.

Swiss director Alain Tanner's fifteenth film reprises his 1987 collaboration with Myriam Mézières as writer and actress in *A Flame in My Heart* – a film praised by Raymond Durgnat as “boldly [reinforcing] Tanner's claim to a central position in radical culture” but condemned elsewhere as “tedious and preposterous” and “direly dated”. A hybrid of the grimy, unglamorised sexual ‘frankness’ of what used to be known quaintly as ‘continental’ movies and the conversational aesthetic of Eric Rohmer (complete with Rohmeresque reveries on consciousness, intuition and moral choice), *The Diary of Lady M* is likely to attract equally forceful derision, while raising interesting questions about the content of Durgnat's claim.

Tanner's heritage as a political filmmaker and Mézières' somewhat different aspiration (expressed in a 1988 interview) to represent female sexual pleasure “from inside a woman's head” suggest that *Lady M* can be viewed from two perspectives. It can be seen as the reheated corpse of the 70s New Left

notion of rampant and, in some undefined sense, ‘anti-bourgeois’ (hetero)sexual activity as a revolutionary duty with profound existential significance. Or it can be seen as a post-feminist assertion of female sexuality and sensibility, freed from the tyrannies of male point-of-view and political correctness while just happening to be made with a man behind the camera and a female body as its focus. The film's ultimate risibility derives from failings on both levels – as well as in more basic matters such as Mézières' navel-gazing narration and hyper-emotive acting. The relentlessness of the latter ensures that the scene in which she learns that Diego is married has no emotional impact at all.

While it's clear from our first sighting of M onstage that she sings rock 'n' roll as only the French know how – appallingly – Mézières has a powerful womanly presence which initially augurs well, and the film's almost tactile visual texture and narrative detail occasionally hint at something more complex than Gallic fucking 'n' philosophising. For instance, there's the moment when Tanner cuts sharply from the calculated erotic control of M's performance (appropriately, one of her costumes evokes Dietrich's infamous jewelled body-stocking) to the furious group having to hassle the club's owner for their pay after the show; or M's perfect ease at wandering night-time Paris alone with a stranger who has just caught her hiding her night's wages in her shoe.

But these gestures towards a materialist take on gender and power remain isolated; by daybreak the couple are feeding each other exotic fruit in the middle of a busy market, and Mézières' script regresses with astounding lack of irony into the clichés of conventional erotica – the supposed frisson (and perhaps self-negatory implications) of M's (self-constructed) anonymity, the presumed profundity of instant obsession, the supposed elusiveness of the object of desire, catfights as a form of lesbian foreplay, and so on. Thus although the (very explicit) heterosexual scenes are more persuasive and woman-friendly than is usually the case (I can't recall the last time I saw a man making substantial use of his hands in a movie, as Juanjo Puigcorbó shows no qualms about doing here) and the emphasis is on M's pleasure, still the camera concentrates exclusively on her body.

The prominent device of M's constant voice-over – supposedly a vessel for her inner emotions, sensations and thoughts – might in a better film function to explore the space between such representations and the truth of female experience, and perhaps create a critical distance from the thrusting and moaning on screen. But here it succeeds only in grafting on po-faced poetics. “He has this way of making love, to stop like a swimmer before he reaches the edge,” M explains redundantly during some overextended screwing. When M's blossoming friendship with and attraction to Nuria ▶

◀ (the first sign we're given that the film's equation of sex with penetrative heterosexuality might be disruptable) overflows into a sexual threesome, it is significant that the voice-over steps in smartly to reassure us that "it was only possible because we loved the same man - I could only reach her through Diego's body."

The mutual fascination which develops between the two women is the most intriguing element in the film. The gulf between the realities of motherhood and M's profoundly anti-maternal self-image, symbolised by Nuria's covert fascination with M's extrovert, sexual clothes and M's eroticised curiosity about Nuria's breast-feeding, amounts to an unusually provocative meditation on female roles. But their relationship is also the site of a crass blindness to the politics of culture and race. Evocations of 'Africa' as a metaphor for the erotic or the subconscious are endemic throughout *Lady M* to a degree that cannot be accidental. M refers to her dreamlike reveries as "wandering in my intimate Africa"; the sole number we see her band perform (which they do three times) uses Maghreb-influenced music and belly-dancing movements to invoke an eroticised North Africa (a fantasy carried through to the name and harem-like decor of the Kismet); and much play is made on the spiritual and even familial affinities of those born around the Mediterranean, described as "the mother of us all".

Yet the film's black women are denied any concrete cultural identity. When M first asks Diego if Nuria is African, his reply is that she is Parisian, and the matter is never elaborated further. Two members of M's backing band are black, yet the sole reference to this is again negative: "Was I born in couscous?" one of them demands sarcastically in response to a dance instruction from M. Presumably Mézières and Tanner regard this mystical colour-blindness as a badge of pan-cultural liberalism; but when M intones that Nuria "looked like an earth goddess on a mission from the goddess of fecundity", it seems that the serene Félicité Wouassi has been saddled with playing not so much a character as a projection of the white imagination.

The film peddles particularly snigger-worthy views on the weird tastes unleashed by female erotic obsession. In *A Flame in My Heart*, the Mézières character's absent lover returned to find her faking sex with a big toy baboon in a sideshow; in *Lady M*'s equivalent cringe-inducing moment, M asks Diego, "Did you know that Muslim women shave their sex?" before proceeding to do likewise as he watches, allowing him to attach one of her huge, heavy-looking earrings to the front of her labia, and gyrating naked (well, nearly) in front of him. The film's closing image shows her removing one of the said earrings alone in her Barcelona hotel room and looking at it wistfully before - mercifully - laying it to rest on the bedside table.

Claire Monk

M. Butterfly

USA 1993

Director: David Cronenberg

Certificate

15

Distributor

Warner Bros

Production Company

Geffen Pictures

Executive Producers

David Henry Hwang

Philip Sandhaus

Producer

Gabriella Martinelli

Budapest Head of Production

László Helle

Production Co-ordinators

Deborah Zwicker

Paris:

Lucette Legot

Production Managers

Marilyn Stonehouse

Budapest:

László Timár

Paris:

Jean-Pierre Avice

Unit Managers

Far East:

Philip Lee

Budapest:

Adrienne Roárius

Location Managers

Debra Beers

Budapest:

Tamás Guba

Paris Unit:

Corinne Kouper

Post-production Supervisor

Marilyn Stonehouse

Post-production Co-ordinator

Sandra Tucker

Casting

Deirdre Bowen

Consultants:

New York:

Joanna Merlin

London:

Doreen Jones

Budapest:

Károly Kupics

Assistant Directors

John Board

Kim Winther

Simon Board

Far East:

Yang Xie

Budapest:

Zsuzsa Gurbán

Gábor Gajdos

Paris:

Léonard Guillain

Cécile Boisrond

Screenplay

David Henry Hwang

Based on his play

Director of Photography

Peter Suschitzky

In colour

Camera Operator

Peter Suschitzky

Steadicam Operators

Far East:

Ted Churchill

Budapest:

Peter Robinson

Editor

Ronald Sanders

Production Designer

Carol Spier

Art Director

James McAteer

Art Department Co-ordinator

Far East:

Boryana Varbanov

Set Decorator

Elinor Rose Galbraith

Set Dresser

Lead:

Clive Thomasson

Peter Nicolakakos

E.C. Whelan

Budapest:

Ferenc Schöffer

Scenic Artists

Key:

John Bannister

Jak Oliver

Special Effects

Budapest:

Georges Demetrau

Music/Music Conductor

Howard Shore

Music Extracts

"Un Bel Di" from

"Madame Butterfly"

by Giacomo Puccini,

performed by Mirella

Freni, The Vienna

Philharmonic; "Coro

A Bocca Chiusa (The

Humming Chorus)"

from "Madame

Butterfly" performed

by The Vienna Opera

Chorus, The Vienna

Philharmonic; "String

Quintet in C Major"

by Franz Schubert,

performed by the

Amadeus Quartet,

Robert Cohen; "Va Mon

Ami Va" performed

by Nana Mouskouri

Music Performed by

Paris Opera "Madama

Butterfly";

Hungarian State Opera

Orchestra

Additional Puccini

Arias:

Royal Philharmonic

Orchestra, Michelle

Couture

Orchestrations

Howard Shore

Music Editor

Suzanne Peric

Beijing Opera Choreography

Jamie H. J. Guan

Michele Ehlers

Costume Design

Denise Cronenberg

Wardrobe Supervisors

Brenda Gilles

Mario Davignon

Make-up Artists

Suzanne Benoit

Allen Weisinger

Ava Stone

Budapest:

Júlia Fenyvessy

Paris:

Antoine Garabedian

Hair Stylists

Aldo Signoretti

Ferdinando Merolla

Budapest:

Margó Vida

Paris:

Antoine Garabedian

Title Design

Balsmeyer ■ Everett

Dialogue Editors

Wayne Griffin

Tony Currie

Rick Cadger

Sound Recordists

Bryan Day

Music:

John Kurlander

Dolby stereo

Sound Re-recordists

Don White

Dingo Pigat

Lou Solakofski

Sound Transfers

Sound Mix Ltd

Sound Effects Editors

David Evans

John Laing

Foley Artist

Terry Burke

French Language Consultant

Norma Cole

Far East Consultant

Dr Peter Mitchell

Stunt Co-ordinator

Béla Ungér

Cast

Jeremy Irons

René Gállimard

John Lone

Song Liling

Barbara Sukowa

Jeanne Gállimard

Ian Richardson

Ambassador Toulon

Annabel Leventon

Frau Baden

Stéphanie Hoehli

Comrade Chin

Richard McMillan

Embassy Colleague

Vernon Dobchhoff

Agent Etancelin

David Numbler

Intelligence Officers

Margaret Ma

Song's Maid

Tristram Jeffcoat

Defense Attorney

Philip McGough

Prosecution Attorney

David Neal

Judge

Sean Hewitt

Ambassador's Aide

Peter Mesalino

Diplomat at Party

Michael Mehlmann

Drunk in Paris Bar

Barbara Chilcott

Critic at Garden Party

George Jonas

Mall Trustee

Carl Zveshin

Surveillance

Technician

Viktor Falop

Marshal

Cadman Chui

Accordian Player

The Beijing Opera Troupe

Beijing Opera

Performers

Maria Teresa Uribe

Paris Opera Madama

Butterfly

Harriet Chung

Monica Gan

Ayumi Nomoda

Tammy Lok

Tracey Oh

Carly Wong

Red Guard Dancers

9,983 feet

101 minutes

Beijing. René Gállimard, a mid-level functionary in France's legation to China, attends a diplomatic reception. At the party, he is struck by the beauty of a rendition of Cio-Cio San's aria from Puccini's *Madame Butterfly* by a performer from the Beijing Opera. He has never heard the opera before, but the performance and the music move him. He meets the performer, Song Liling, and compliments her. She belittles his taste as the product of a bourgeois colonialist mentality, and invites him to attend the Beijing Opera - "to further your education." Returning home, he discusses the evening with his wife, not mentioning his attraction to Song Liling.

Gállimard begins to pursue Song Liling, attending her performances at the Beijing Opera, visiting her home, exchanging letters. At his work, the intelligence operatives belittle him as a mere accountant, but his diligence does not go unrewarded, and he rises in the embassy. His promotion emboldens him, and Gállimard pursues Song Liling more diligently, apparently never wondering why the woman of his dreams will not remove her clothes in his presence, even while they are having sex. Song Liling is visited by her control; her affair with Gállimard is being controlled by Chinese intelligence, who find the imposture repugnant. She tells Gállimard that she is

pregnant, and produces a child in the midst of the Cultural Revolution, at the very moment when Gállimard returns to France and she is sent to a re-education camp.

Now separated from his wife, Gállimard mopes around Paris, living in a pathetic room and attending performances of *Madame Butterfly*. One night, following a riot by Parisian Maoists, he returns to his apartment to find Song Liling. He finds work as a government courier, carrying sensitive documents and passing them to Chinese intelligence. Gállimard and Song Liling are arrested and tried. The prosecutors are dumbfounded by the idea that Gállimard did not know that Song Liling was really a man. In prison, before an audience of convicts, Gállimard paints his face as a Beijing Opera performer, delivers a monologue on his suffering, and commits suicide.

David Cronenberg's film of Henry David Hwang's hit play *M. Butterfly* stands as the director's most perverse gesture towards the mainstream. *M. Butterfly* falls into the broad genre of award-winning film-making - an impeccably literary subject adapted by the original author using exotic location, and starring both Academy Award-winning Jeremy Irons and John Lone, star of Bertolucci's *The Last Emperor*, the biggest Oscar winner of the modern era.

In its jonging for respectability, *M. Butterfly* has a certain kinship with Scorsese's *The Age of Innocence*, but if Scorsese's characters create their problems by repressing their emotional impulses, Cronenberg's create their problems by giving in to them. Discussions of *M. Butterfly* have tended so far to centre on what the film lacks, but rather, the real problem lies in what it has - in the way that the chill of Cronenberg's work here achieves a truly cryogenic quality. Cronenberg's problem with audiences derives less from the strangeness of his material than from the clinical detachment of his style, and his fondness for such emotionally remote actors as Christopher Walken, James Woods and Jeremy Irons. The typical Cronenberg chill was offset by the considerable warmth of Jeff Goldblum and Geena Davis in what turned out to be his biggest hit,



Wings of desire: John Lone, Jeremy Irons

The Fly.

Based on the true story of a French diplomat who had a 20-year affair with a female impersonator from the Beijing Opera who worked for Chinese intelligence, David Henry Hwang's play functions as a didactic reply to the West's Madame Butterfly stereotypes about Asian women. Hwang's play has a preaching quality absent from Cronenberg's work, and one wonders where Hwang has found this obsession with submissive Asian women in Western culture. Usually, if something exists within the popular consciousness, it will somewhere be manifest in the popular culture, yet it's hard to see that the stereotype and obsession have shown up in Anglo-Saxon culture since the late 50s (*South Pacific*, *The World of Susie Wong*). One wonders what Hwang thinks of the films of Mizoguchi and Naruse, so many of which concentrate on submissive, stoically enduring women.

The easy comparison to *The Crying Game* (apparently, the diplomat never realised that his butterfly, like all the Beijing Opera performers, was a man). But where the surprise revelation in Neil Jordan's film has a narrative function and emotional importance, Cronenberg makes no attempt to convince the audience of John Lone's femininity. Cronenberg offers the spectacle of a man creating an imaginative universe in his own image - which for all the film's Broadway roots puts *M. Butterfly* in the same thematic boat as *Videodrome* and *Naked Lunch*. One admires the result - the precision of Irons' performance, Carol Spier's extraordinary art direction, which makes Beijing look like a suburb of *Naked Lunch*'s Interzone, and the seamless privacy of the film's world. But one doesn't enjoy it, and I speak as someone who enjoys Cronenberg's films very much.

Cronenberg and Hwang's sensibilities offer as startling a mismatch as Bernard Haitink's recordings of Shostakovich's symphonies - the playing has an impeccable polish, but there's all this stuff trapped underneath, screaming to get out. Cronenberg has an abiding interest in the structure of repression rather than in currently fashionable questions of multiculturalism and gender, and in his best films, all that stuff gets out, usually in the form of mutation and/or madness. The infant assassins of *The Brood*, the paranoid universe inhabited by James Woods in *Videodrome* and Peter Weller in *Naked Lunch*, the *folie à deux* of the doctors in *Dead Ringers*, all demonstrate what happens when people suppress their darker impulses - they emerge on their own.

The film's final confrontation between Lone and Irons tries to get the bad stuff out, but it doesn't really succeed. *M. Butterfly*'s climactic scene, which seeks admission into the world of Cronenbergian transformation, works as a *coup de théâtre*, but seems miles removed from the world of the film that we've seen.

John Harkness

Mother's Boys

USA 1993

Director: Yves Simoneau

Certificates

15

Distributor

Guild

Production Company

CBS Entertainment

Executive Producers

Bob Weinstein

Harvey Weinstein

Randall Poster

Executive in Charge of Production

Robert Gros

Producers

Jack E. Freedman

Wayne S. Williams

Patricia Herskovic

Associate Producer

Dan Franklin

Production Co-ordinator

Lisa Van Cott

Unit Production Manager

Dan Franklin

Location Manager

Ralph B. Meyer

Post-production Supervisor

Hilarie Roope

2nd Unit Director

Steve M. Boyum

Costing

Francine Maister

Associate:

Kathleen Driscoll

Assistant Directors

Steve Danton

Bruce Carter

Leslie D. Franks

2nd Unit:

Arthur Anderson

Jay Smith

Screenplay

Barry Schneider

Richard Hawley

Based on the novel

by Bernard Taylor

Director of Photography

Elliot Davis

In colour

2nd Unit Director of Photography

Ron Vargas

Camera Operators

John Nuler

2nd Unit:

Michael Ferris

Pat McGinnis

Steadicam Operator

John Nuler

Opticals

Cinema Research

Corporation

Editor

Michael Ornstein

Art Director

David Bomba

Visual Consultant

Peter Paul Raubertas

Art Department

Co-ordinator

Jonathan Alexandre

Raubertas

Set Decorator

Barbara Cassel

Set Dressers

Mark Kusy

Kevin Coyle

Don Riley

Eric Polczwartek

Lead Scenic Artist

Randy Pepprock

Storyboard Artists

David Lowery

David Negron

Special Effects Designer

Peter Chesney

Mechanical Special Effects

Image Special Effects

Company

Pyrotechnics

Jor van Kline

Music

George S. Clinton

Orchestrations

George S. Clinton

Carlo Jean Paul Gisnez

Music Editor

Marty Wereski

Song

"The Longest Night"

by and performed by George S. Clinton

Costume Design

Deena Appel

Simon Tuke

Costume Supervisor

Michael Hamer

Key Make-up Artist

Julie Hewett

Make-up Artist

Jane Ridley Brickman

Key Hairstylist

Frances Mathias

Hairstylists

Jennifer Bell

2nd Unit:

Gus Le Pre

Title Design

Schlutts Design

International

Titles/Opticals

Perpetual Motion

Pictures

Supervising Sound Editors

Fred Judkins

Scott Weber

Sound Editors

Dave Concors

David Lee Hagberg

Phil Hess

William Hooper

Supervising ADR Editor

Chris Jargo

Sound Recordists

Clark King

Music:

John Whynott

ADR Recordist

Doc Kane

Foley Recordist

David Gertz

Dolby stereo

Dolby Re-recordists

Rick Ash

Dean Zufanis

Larry Pitman

Foley Artists

James Moriann

Jeffrey Wildon

Rich Green

Consultants

Project:

David Field

Psychological:

Mory Framer

Steve Hasenberg

Stunt Co-ordinator

Kevin Swigert

Cast

Jamie Lee Curtis

Jude Madigan

Peter Gallagher

Robert Madigan

Joanne Whalley-Kilmer

Callie

Vanessa Rodriguez

Lydia

Luke Edwards

Kes

Colin Ward

Michael

Joey Zimmerman

Ben

Joas Acland

Lansing

Post Galleto

Mark Kaplan

J.E. Freeman

Everett

John C. McKinley

Mr Fogel

Jim Freedman

Nurse

Lorraine Yousoub

Robert's Associate

Ken Lerner

Analyst

Mary Anne McGarry

Planetarium Woman

Judith Roberts

Narrator

Sachi Ena

Cynthia

Joanne Jackson

Market Mom

Jesse Stock

Market Kid

John

Jocko the Dog

8,579 feet

95 minutes

Three years ago, Jude Madigan walked out on her husband Robert and their three sons. While 12-year-old Kes, the eldest, is prone to violent rages, his younger brothers Michael, ten, and Ben, six, have settled into their new life and are fond of their father's new girlfriend Callie, the assistant principal at their school. When Jude suddenly returns to reclaim her family, even her own mother Lydia disapproves. Undeterred, Jude appears at the house, where a furious Robert tells her to stay away. But despite his misgivings, he is obliged to let her see her boys. Jude soon wins over the little ones with Nintendo Game Boys and a trip to the planetarium, and confuses the fragile Kes with her own version of events. She then attempts to seduce Robert, but he tells her he is filing for divorce.

Determined to drive Callie away, Jude spray-paints her car and makes mischief at her office. Jude and Kes go away for the weekend. Insisting that they have a stronger than normal mother-son bond because he was born by Caesarian, Jude convinces Kes that Callie is the sole obstacle to the family's reunion. She persuades him to scare Callie with a particularly hostile game. Trials. Lydia overhears Kes explaining the plan to his brothers and confronts him, but he accidentally pushes her down the stairs. Determined to protect the family, Lydia narrowly escapes being suffocated by Jude at the hospital. When Robert goes to the hospital, Kes sets up a mock trial on Jude's instructions, with the handcuffed Callie as the accused.

Ben trips when bringing Callie a glass of water and stabs himself on a shard of broken glass. Callie begs Kes to release her so she can drive him to the hospital, but Kes runs outside to see why the dog is barking. Callie is freed by Michael but is unable to open her car door and runs for help with Ben in her arms. Kes and Michael follow in the car. Jude, who is lying in wait for Callie's car, has tampered with the brakes and sends the family dog into the middle of the road to cause an accident. Kes and Michael drive over the cliff, and Jude watches in horror as Callie climbs down to save the boys. Jude follows, intent on finishing the job, but falls to her death.

The formula thriller's yuppie family (here Robert is an architect) has been threatened by such a barrage of psychotic interlopers - overzealous cops, mad tenants, crazed nannies, evil neighbours, wall-eyed temporary secretaries among them - that it was only a matter of time before someone placed the seeds of destruction within the family itself. *Mother's Boys* is a kind of *Fatal Attraction* in reverse, which might have been intriguing if the movie had an iota of credibility. After all, the desire of a mother to come back to her family has great emotional potential.

But in the movie's terms, Jude's running out on her family has stripped her of any maternal, feminine quali-



Mommie dearest: Jamie Lee Curtis

ties. She is clearly a psycho even before she starts punching out windows and parading naked in front of her son. So when Robert snarls "I'll kill her" the moment she comes back, this is presented as the normal reaction of a concerned father, not as any indication that he might have played a part in her running away.

The movie is not concerned with ambiguity - it does not empathise with Jude's regret at the years she has lost, or with her rage at being excluded from the family's smug little barbecues and shopping trips. Her maternal longings are presented as a sham. It's no accident that Jamie Lee Curtis, the most androgynous of Hollywood actresses, plays Jude, and she is directed to emphasise her predatory, reckless edge. Her angular body and David Bowie-esque hairstyle make you wonder how this unnatural woman could have given birth. Jude drives a Mercedes sports car while Callie, the single career woman, drives a family station wagon - it's clear who the real mother is.

But the film is not about nature versus nurture, the snapping of biological ties; it's just an excuse to jolt us in our seats a few times. And when it comes down to it, the film-makers' nerve fails. The movie does not have anything very horrifying (or even mildly interesting) up its sleeve, and it shies away from even the most incidental of casualties - Ben gets to the hospital on time, Grandma recovers, Callie is shaken but not stirred, even Jocko the dog is unscathed.

To compensate for his singularly ineffective psychopath, director Yves Simoneau falls back on empty stylistic clichés - goldfish bowls toppling over in slow motion, *Vertigo*-style spinning shots, screeching zoom-ins. A frog swims slowly through the title sequence as a scalpel drops into a child's outstretched hand - this leads into the opening scene, where Kes goes berserk in biology class on frog dissecting day. But the frogs, like the rest of the film, have no particular significance. *Mother's Boys* offers little more than the mild amusement of watching Joanne Whalley-Kilmer struggle with an American accent and a ridiculous wig-like hairdo, and as the film creaks towards its laborious, implausible climax one barely has the energy to shrug.

Caren Myers

My Father, the Hero

USA 1994

Director: Steve Miner

Certificata

PG
Distributor
 Buena Vista
Production Company
 Touchstone Pictures
 presents a
 Cité Films production
 In association with
 Film par Film
 D.D. productions
 The Edward S. Feldman
 Company

Executive Producer

Edward S. Feldman

Producers

Jacques Bar
 Jean-Louis Livi

Co-producer

Ted Swanson

Production Supervisor

Eric Angelson

Production Co-ordinators

Ginny Warner

New York:

Michael Boonstra

Production Manager

Ted Swanson

Location Managers

Joan Carroll

2nd Unit/New York:

Daniel Strol

2nd Unit Director

David Ellis

Casting

Dianne Crittenden

LA Associate:

Joy Dickson

Miami Associate:

Michael Dock

Miami/Bahamas:

Ellen Jacoby

ADR Voice:

Barbara Harris

Assistant Directors

Dennis Maguire

John E. Gallagher

Darryl B. Frank

T. Sean Ferguson

Screenplay

Francis Veber

Charlie Peters

Based on the film

Mon père, ce héros by

Gérard Lauzier

Director of Photography

Daryn Okada

In colour

prints by

Technicolor

2nd Unit Director

of Photography

Nick McLean

Aerial Photography

Donald Sweeney

B Camera Operator/

Steadicam Operator

Guy Norman Bee

Opticals

Buena Vista Imaging

Editor

Marshall Harvey

Production Designer

Christopher Nowak

Art Director

Patricia Woodbridge

Set Decorators

Don K. Ivey

NY Unit:

Claudette Didul

Lead Scenic Artist

John Balling

Storyboard Artist

Doug Lefler

Special Effects Supervisor

Bob Cooper

Music

David Newman

Music Extract

"Sonata in A Minor

K.310 (11th

movement)" by

Wolfgang Amadeus

Mozart, performed

by Ralph Grierson

Vocal Solos Performed by

Mervyn Warren

Ashley Thompson

Vocal Arrangements

David Newman

Mervyn Warren

Orchestrations

David Newman

Supervising Music Editor

Tom Villano

Songs

"Back to the Island"

by Ronnie Butler,

Eddie Rolle, "Gin and

Coconut Water"

(traditional), "Land

of the Sea and Sun"

by Irving Burgie,

"Mo'Junkanoo"

by Kendal Stubbs,

Quinten Hepburn,

"Island Boy" by Eric

Minnus, "Oh Father"

by Fred Ferguson,

Steve Greenberg,

Curtis Jones, Herschel

Small, Kendal Stubbs,

performed by The Baha

Men; "Tango in A" by

Michael Mulfrriedel;

"Thank Heaven for

Little Girls" by Alan

Jay Lerner, Frederick

Loewe; "Dance Hall

Soca" by B. Lee,

B. Henry, K. Phillips,

performed by Byron

Lee and the

Dragonnaires

Costume Design

Vicki Sanchez

Costume Consultant

Jo Ynocencio

Wardrobe Supervisors

Shari Feldman

Bridget Ostersehle

Make-up Artist

Guissepe Campagna

Hairstylist

Marsha Lewis

Title Design

Burke Mattsson

Supervising Sound Editor

Dane A. Davis

Dialogue Editors

Kimberly Lowe Voigt

Martin Bram

Supervising ADR Editor

G.W. Brown

Foley Editors

Tom Hammond

Kini Kay

Sound Recordists

Joseph Geisinger

New York:

Les Lazarowitz

Music:

Tim Boyle

Bob Fernandez

ADR Recordists

Doc Kane

Paul Zydel

Foley Recordist

David Gertz

Dolby stereo

Sound Re-recordists

John Reitz

Dave Campbell

Gregg Rudloff

Sound Effects Editor

Todd Toon

Foley Artists

James Moriana

Jeffrey Wilhoit

Stunt Co-ordinator

Tim Davison

Marine Co-ordinator

Gavin McKinney

Cast

Gérard Depardieu

André

Katherine Heigl

Nicole

Emma Thompson
 Isabelle
 Dalton James
 Ben
 Lauren Hutton
 Megan
 Faith Price
 Diana
 Stephen Tobolowsky
 Mike
 Ann Horn
 Stella
 Robyn Peterson
 Doris
 Frank Benzilli
 Fred
 Manny Jacobs
 Raymond
 Jeffrey Chae
 Pablo
 Stephen Barrows
 Hakim
 Michael Robinson
 Tom
 Robert Miner
 Mr Porter
 Betty Miner
 Mrs Porter
 Roberto Escobar
 Alberto
 Yusuf Bales
 Cab Driver
 Stacey Williamson
 Airport Bartender
 Maïou Corrigan
 Ben's Girlfriend

Robin Boller
 Raymond's Girlfriend
 Steve Wico
 Ben's Father
 Judy Clayton
 Ben's Mother
 Bonnie Byfield
 Tom Behr
 Guests
 Jennifer Roberts
 Felicity Ingraham
 Girls
 Noa Melly
 Pablo's Girlfriend
 Sid Raymond
 Elderly Guest
 Anthony Delaney
 Hotel Bartender
 Nichelle Rio
 Girl on TV
 Dave Carey
 Father at Beach
 Dorian Jones
 David
 Juan Santillan
 Eileen Santillan
 Tango Dancers
 Isiah Taylor
 Wolowiah Hield
 Colyn Grant
 Fred Ferguson
 Herschel Small
 Jeffrey Chae
 The Baha Men

8,087 feet
 90 minutes

Divorced André takes his 14-year-old daughter Nicole on holiday to a Caribbean resort. André is worried about his relationship with his girlfriend Isabelle in Paris; she wants more commitment from him and refuses to answer his calls. Nicole thinks the resort is boring until she spots Ben, a dishy young stud who lives on the island. To impress him, she lies about her age and pretends that André is not her father but a lover who saved her from a life on the streets. Ben tells the other guests, and soon everyone shuns André, thinking him a dirty old man. Upset at the thought that André might marry Isabelle and have more children, Nicole runs to Ben, who tries to persuade her to leave André, but André fetches her back.

Back at their hotel room, Nicole guiltily confesses her lies to André, who is furious. Nonetheless, he agrees to help her out by sticking to the story. They tell Ben that they are no longer sleeping together, so that he'll think the coast is clear for him to court Nicole. André and Nicole make up outrageous stories about André, hinting

that he is a spy and mercenary. Fascinated, Ben begins to spend more time with André than with Nicole. After seeing how lovingly she watches André play piano one night, Ben renounces his claim on Nicole, thinking that she loves André more. When André almost drowns trying to save Nicole, she inadvertently calls him Daddy in Ben's presence, and the truth comes out. Ben angrily spurns them both. André helps Nicole woo Ben with letters and a Cyrano de Bergerac-style balcony scene in which he tells her romantic things to shout up to Ben, thus winning her back. As the young lovers dance on the beach, André proposes over the phone to Isabelle, saying he wants to have children with her, hopefully all girls. Tearfully, she accepts.

Latest in the current spate of Hollywood remakes of French films comes *My Father, the Hero*, an almost word-for-translated-word remake of Gérard Lauzier's 1991 *Mon père, ce héros*. It even features the same star, Gérard Depardieu - either a spectacularly unimaginative or brilliant casting coup, depending on your perspective. One shudders to imagine what kind of financial desperation must have driven him to reprise the role - perhaps his entire vineyard crop failed last year, or maybe he needs a new Masarati. Whatever the motive, the film will do no favours for his reputation, nor for those of anyone involved with it. The fact that Emma Thompson, playing the shadowy Isabelle, doesn't appear in the credits might indicate more shame than modesty on her part. This feeble comedy generates its biggest laugh from Depardieu saying the heroine's name - Nicole - with a French accent, irresistibly recalling the Renault Clio adverts. Sadly, the joke wears off after five minutes.

The original film was hardly a masterpiece, but it had a certain effervescence and nonchalant ease with its own silliness that only French sex farces can pull off. Marie Gillain as the daughter (there named Véro) was appealingly natural, while Depardieu held the centre well, coasting on his charisma. As Philip Strick noted in this journal, it once again reworked French

cinema's decade-long preoccupation with "the twin themes of nymphetology and incest" without asking any really awkward questions. Véro and André's intimacy was mainly familial, only faintly tinged with illicit desire.

For such a family-oriented film, this Touchstone remake puts surprisingly more electricity into its version of the Electra complex. The incestuous subtext becomes even more striking, especially when it is being disavowed. For example, a showy fuss is made about Nicole and André sleeping in separate rooms while their earlier incarnations were content to share. In the original, Véro wore a buttock-revealing swimsuit that André insisted she cover up. This time round, Depardieu produces a full-on eye-goggling double take. The camera, reflecting his point of view, zooms in on the even more abundant display of pubescent flesh. Later he has epileptic fits of sexual jealousy when she talks to older men. Nicole's anger with her father is born from having spotted him with his girlfriend Isabelle when he should have been at her birthday party. In true scorned-woman style, she repays him for the snub by being the most irritating, spoiled, stuck-up brat to grace the screen for a long time. André's request to Isabelle to have another daughter can only be understood as a desperate attempt to get it right the next time, hopefully with the help of a less permissive European education.

Subtlety is not *My Father, the Hero's* strong point. When it comes to the balcony scene, André even feeds Nicole lines straight from *Cyrano de Bergerac*. These are flagged so obviously as allusions that even the most illiterate viewer who had never seen a subtitle couldn't fail to spot the joke (again, this scene is more discreetly done in the original). The same goes for the film's second funniest moment when, upon being asked to sing something French, André launches into an exuberant rendition of "Thank Heaven for Little Girls" from *Gigi*. The cast get into the spirit of things by overacting so shamelessly they could fry bacon in the back row. Depardieu's self-parodying histrionics are more embarrassing than amusing. It's as if he were trying to do an impression of Charles Grodin in the *Beethoven* films.

Where Lauzier wisely aimed for the wry smile rather than the belly laugh, here director Steve Miner can't resist cranking up the slapstick volume, producing an annoying feedback whine that grates on the nerves. The result is like some bastard progeny of *Lolita* and the worst of Disney's live action 60s comedies, such as *The Absent Minded Professor*. *My Father, the Hero* ends up being so unfunny it's hilarious, but the joke is ultimately on the producers. You don't have to be a black-polo-neck-wearing francophile to see that hardly a single American remake of a French movie has been any good. Let us hope the flopping of this latest atrocity augurs the cessation of this insidious Hollywood habit.

Leslie Folperin Sharman



"Nicole!" "Papa!": Gérard Depardieu, Katherine Heigl

My New Gun

USA 1992

Director: Stacy Cochran

Certificate

15

Distributor

Warner Bros

Production Company

IRS Media present a

My New Gun

production

Executive Producers

Miles A. Copeland III

Paul Colichman

Harold Welb

Producer

Michael Flynn

Co-producer

Lydia Dean Pilcher

Production Executives

Steven Reich

Kevin Reidy

Melissa Cobb

Production Co-ordinator

Lois Nalepka

Production Manager

Ann Ruark

Unit Co-ordinator

George Norfleet

Location Manager

Maria T. Bierniak

Post-production Supervisor

Kerry Orent

LA Casting

Donald Paul Pemrick

Assistant Directors

Eric Heffron

Todd Pfeiffer

Brian Gutherman

Screenplay

Stacy Cochran

Director of Photography

Ed Lachman

Colour

DuArt

Prints by

FotoKem

Editor

Camilla Toniolo

Production Designer

Tony Corbett

Set Decorator

Catherine Davis

Set Dressers

Joel Barkow

Joe Leggiere

Jennifer Burton

Rose Marie Cappelluti

Scene Artists

Fry Karins

Siena G. Porta

Don Geyra

Jeff Miller

Bill Murphy

Special Effects

Mark Bero

Will Caban

Matthew Vogel

Music

Pat Irwin

Music Performed by

Vocals:

Syd Straw

Guitar/Clarinet/

Keyboards/Bass:

Pat Irwin

Drums:

Dougie Bowne

Bass:

Sebastian Steinberg

Chris Wood

Cello:

Jane Scarpantoni

Percussion:

Billy Martin

Vibes/Marimba:

Bill Ware

Pedal Steel:

Gib Wharton

Guitar:

Oren Bloedow

Music Supervisor

Paul DiFranco

Songs

"That's When I Reach

for My Revolver" by

Clint Conley, "Picture

of You" by Pat Irwin,

Stacy Cochran,

performed by Syd

Straw; "Holiday Inn Spain" by Pat Irwin, Christensen, Harris, performed by the Raybeats; "Girls Ltd" by and performed by Don Dixon; "Witness to a Crime" by Mitchell Dancik, performed by Just Water; "Only a Dream" by Amy McMahon Rigby, performed by The Shams; "Chez Roger #1" by Art Wood, Ken Rarick
Costume Design
Eugenie Bafaloukos
Wardrobe Supervisor
Rose Cuervo
Key Make-up Artist
Lori Hicks
Key Hairstylist
Peg Schierholz
Titles/Opticals
The Effect House
Supervising Sound Editor
Hal Levinson
Sound Editor
Magdaline Volaitis
ADR Editor
Harriet Fildow
Sound Recordists
Ed Novick
Music:
Nick Prout
Dolby stereo
Sound Re-recorder
Peter Waggoner
Sound Effects Editor
Eugene Gearty
Stunt Co-ordinators
Jerry Hewitt
Micky O'Rourke

Cast

Diane Lane

Debbie Bender

James LeGros

Skippy

Stephen Collins

Gerald Bender

Tess Harper

Kimmy Hayes

Bruce Altman

Irwin Bloom

Maddie Corman

Myra

Bill Raymond

Andrew

Suzzy Roche

Check-out Girl

Phillip Seymour

Chris Hoffman

Patti Chambers

Janice Phee

Stephen Pearman

Al Schlyen

Leslie Brett Daniels

Waitress

Paul J.Q. Lee

Desk Manager

Angela Marie Baker

Maid at Ramada

Ken Gash

Bell Hop

Gone Confield

Detective

Quisley Levy

Grandma Mo

La Chance

Kelly Jane

Merry Blackman

Bartender

Frankie Hughes

Kase Picoy

Cops

Lois Ackerman

Woman in Charge

Nancy Friedman

Woman at Wedding

Matt Malley

Ray Benson

8,907 feet

99 minutes

Debbie and her husband Gerald live on a suburban estate in New Jersey. One evening their friends Irwin and Myra announce that they are getting married. Irwin also tells Gerald that he has bought his young fiancée a .38 gun for protection. Gerald insists on purchasing the same for Debbie. She has nightmares about the gun kept in the bedside drawer and wakes up one night screaming. Skippy, an enigmatic young neighbour and Debbie's pal, rings her up to check that she is all right. Later, Debbie tells him about the gun. Skippy asks to borrow the gun; Debbie refuses. Skippy, however, steals the pistol. When Gerald discovers that the gun is missing, Debbie tells him she lent it to Skippy; but later the truth comes out and Gerald goes to confront the young man. Skippy hands the gun back, but on his way out, Gerald trips up and shoots himself in the foot.

With Gerald in hospital, Debbie visits Skippy to ask for the gun back (in shock, Gerald dropped it in Skippy's garden). While they talk, Skippy's colleague goes to fetch some tapes from Skippy's car. He is shot and wounded by a mystery man in a red VWB. Later, Skippy asks Debbie if he can borrow her car, explaining that he has to take his mother to the airport. That evening Debbie learns that Gerald will be detained in hospital. Skippy returns with the car and asks if he can stay in Debbie's house. He also gives her the gun back. Later, Debbie sees Skippy's mother putting out the trash. Thinking this odd, she goes to investigate and talks her way into Skippy's house. Snooping around, she learns from newspaper clippings that Skippy's mom is Kimmy Hayes, a former country music star. When Kimmy finds Debbie in her bedroom, she gashes her with a pair of scissors.

Skippy is surprised when Debbie tells him his mother is back. Later, Debbie and Skippy end up in bed at Skippy's house. There is an anonymous call in the middle of the night. Concerned, Skippy decides to check Kimmy into a local hotel. The next day, Gerald returns and tells Debbie he wants a separation. Skippy moves in with Debbie. A few days later, the man in the red VWB turns up at Debbie's house. He ascertains that she is attending a wedding the following day. The man seems to be on the trail of Kimmy. Debbie and Skippy visit Kimmy at the hotel; in her room, a maid has been shot at by an intruder. Skippy persuades Kimmy to call in the police; it transpires that she is being stalked by her ex-husband Andrew. The police offer protection and accompany Debbie, Skippy and Kimmy to Myra and Irwin's wedding. Unknown to them, Andrew is in the wedding party. While Debbie is attending to Myra, she finds the bride's gun and takes it. Just as the wedding is about to begin, Andrew starts brandishing his gun about. Using Myra's gun, Debbie saves the day and Andrew is arrested. Meanwhile Kimmy takes an overdose and dies. After such traumas, Debbie and Skippy

borrow a friend's car and drive away.

"The gun was merely a catalyst for a reaction waiting to happen," explains the priggish Gerald when he informs Debbie that he's leaving her because of recent events. "You composed that," she retorts. In such a way New York based director-writer Stacy Cochran makes manifest the conceit at the heart of her debut feature. It's a shotgun end to a marriage that had little fire power in the first place. But the problem with the film is that it rather labours the point, and so what might have been conceived as a wry comedy becomes a one-line joke that palls after a while. Cochran might have fared better if she'd cut it down a size since there are all the ingredients for a nifty short. She assembles a neat cast and has an obvious talent for directing them. But the film might have worked a tad better if it had junked some of its self-conscious quirkiness: making mirth out of the bland sometimes just becomes bland in itself.

With the film set in the familiar territory of the stale New Jersey suburbs, one could well believe that Debbie and Gerald were neighbours to Rosanna Arquette and her whirlpool salesman husband in *Desperately Seeking Susan*. Both Cochran and Susan Seidelman share the same director of photography, doyen of East Coast hipsters Ed Lachman. Indeed, Cochran seems a bit slow on the heels of Seidelman's film, given that the yuppie satire has rather exhausted its point in the 90s. Gerald is into consumer durables, and whatever Irwin has, he must have too - including state-of-the-art Gore-Tex jackets and mother-of-pearl-encrusted .38s for the wife. It's a bad case of keeping up with the neighbours. Debbie looks on deeply unimpressed, but instead of forming an addiction to the personal columns, like Arquette's character, or to Prozac, she finds her diversion with the boy next door.

Played by James Le Gros, in a suitably understated performance, Skippy is immediately marked as a bit dangerous to know. There's the whiff of drugs and mayhem about Le Gros which he hasn't quite shaken off from films such as *Drugstore Cowboy*, *The Rapture* and *Rush*. But in *My New Gun*, Skippy really is just the boy next door who cares for his pill-popping mamma (a catatonic Tess Harper floats magnificently through the film like a slightly deflated helium balloon). Meanwhile the sinister shenanigans all have a sound explanation, even if it is in the form of a psychotic ex-husband. But this New Jersey mystery murders any tension, comic or otherwise. That's a shame, because Cochran probably has as much talent as some of the East Coast indie boys who swing it with the same old material (her film is no greater a crime than, say, *Amongst Friends*, Rob Weiss' recent tale of middle-class mobsters, and that film hasn't done any damage to his career). She should be encouraged to have another shot at the game.

Lizzie Francke

On Deadly Ground

USA 1994

Director: Steven Seagal

Certificate

15

Distributor

Warner Bros

Production Company

Seagal/Nasso

Productions

For Warner Bros

Executive Producers

Robert Watts

Jeffrey Robinov

Producers

Steven Seagal

Julius R. Nasso

A. Kitman Ho

Co-producer

Edward McDonnell

Line Producer

Robin D'Arcy

Associate Producers

Peter Burrell

Doug Metzger

Production Supervisor

Gary Stanuck

Unit Production Manager

Peter Burrell

Location Managers

Alaska:

Dow Griffith

LA:

Laura Sode-Matteson

Washington:

Mike Fantasia

Post-production Supervisor

Heiene Mulholland

2nd Unit Director

Glenn Randall Jnr

Casting

Pamela Basker

Alaska:

Carol Carlson

Assistant Directors

Doug Metzger

Jeff Okabayashi

Mark Tobey

Washington/Alaska:

Sean Kavanagh

2nd Unit:

Tracy Rosenthal

Brian Steward

Screenplay

Ed Horowitz

Robin U. Russin

Director of Photography

Ric Waite

CinemaScope

Colour

Technicolor

Additional Photography

Alaska:

Theo Van de Sande

2nd Unit Director of Photography

John M. Stephens

Visual Effects Photography

Bill Neil

Wildlife Unit Photography

Scott Ransom

Aerial Photography

David Nowell

Camera Operators

Rick Neff

David Emmerichs

2nd Unit:

Steve Shank

Steadicam Operator

David Emmerichs

Video/Computer Supervisor

Liz Radley

Visual Effects Supervisor

Dennis Michelson

Matte Artist

Rocco Gioffre

Computer Animation

Brian Callier

Editors

Robert A. Ferretti

Don Brochu

Production Designer

William Ladd Skinner

Art Director

Lou Montejeno

Set Design Supervisor

Nick Navarro

Set Decorators

John Anderson

Ronald R. Reiss

Special Effects Co-ordinator

Thomas L. Fisher

Miniature Effects

Stetson Visual Services

Robert Spurlock

Mark Stetson

Miniature Special Effects Chief

John Striber

Miniature Special Effects

Roy Goode

Erik Stohl

Micky Duffy

Miniature Pyrotechnician Chief

Joe Viskocil

Chief Model Maker

Leslie Ekker

Stunt Crew Chiefs

Henry Gonzales

Scott Schneider

Chris Cowan

Music/Music Conducted by

Basil Poledouris

Orchestrations

Greig McRitchie

Music Supervisors

Budd Carr

Associate:

Sylvia Nestor

Music Editor

Curtis Roush

Songs

"Inuit Throat Singing"

performed by Qaunaq

Mikkigak, Timangiak

Mary Andrews
Zack Davis
Robert Ulrich
Foley Supervisor
Shawn Sykora
Foley Editors
Steven J. Schwalbe
Rocky Moriana Jr
Joe H. Hoisen
Sound Recordists
Edward Tise
2nd Unit:
Gordon Ecker Jr
Music:
Tim Boyle
ADR Recordist
Thomas J. O'Connell
Foley Recordist
Mary Jo Lang
Dolby stereo
Sound Re-recordists
Donald O. Mitchell
Greg P. Russell
Frank Montano
Foley Artists
John Roesch
Hilda Hodges
Technical Advisors
Brian Westcott
Jason Venokur
Robin Mounsey
Lyman Weaselbear
Jim Vizzolini
Bill Baker
Apanguluk Charlie
Kairaiuak
Stunt Co-ordinators
Glenn Randall
Additional:
Conrad E. Palmisano
Animation Co-ordinator
David Paris
Head Wrangler
Jay Fishburn
Dog Team Logistics
Co-ordinator
Libby Riddles
Animal Trainers
Alvin Mears
Bart the Bear:
Doug Seus' Wasatch
Mountain Wildlife

Cast
Steven Seagal
Forrest Taft
Michael Colme
Michael Jennings
Joan Chen
Masu
John C. McGinley
MacGruder
R. Lee Erney
Stone
Skari Skerttack
Liles
Billy Bob Thornton
Homer Carlton
Richard Hamilton
Hugh Palmer
Chief Irvin Brink
Silook
Apanguluk Charlie
Kairaiuak
Tunrak
Elain Fitchhead
Takanapsaluk
John Trudell
Johnny Redfeather
Mike Starr
Big Mike
Sera-Olo Thurson
Otto
Jules Donjariak
Drunken Eskimo
Moses Wassilie
Joseph Ittok
Nanny Kagah
Elak

Irvin Korahmer
Walters
Kang
Roak
Todd Beadie
Collins
Ivan Kano
Spinks
David John Cervantes
Stokes
David Seiberg
Harold
Ariza Wall
Make-up Woman
Carolina Chang
Dream Woman
Roid Anato
Etok
Fumiyasu Daikyu
Maktak
Warren Takato
Oovi
Joe Lala
Guard
Chic Daniel
Chic
Jim Farnum
Reporter
Conrad E. Palmisano
Richter
Webster Whinery
Independent
David Paris
Gary Farrell
Helicopter Pilots
Dobbie Houk
Bar Woman
Brian Simpson
Mr Bear
Peter Nery Tuissonepe
Craig Ryan Ng
Workers
Nicole Miller
Summer Helstrand
Little Girls
Billie Jo Price
Girl's Mother
Patrick Gorman
Chris Dunn
Oil Executives
Pin Reyes
Dianna Wan
Rossmen Pooleak
Mia Suh
Lisa Hardone
Gabriel L. Maktoyak
Vince Pihongama
Edward Tolano
Wilfred Anonik
Victoria J. Pusuruk
Sronia A. Tlatana
Dancers
Seago Blackstar Whitlow
Louie Gray
Service Falling Leaves
Little Crow
Billie Jo Price
Soney D.M. Paralez
Medicine People
Edith Akpik
Wolou Hakkilo
Mark M. Hirtzuka
Mary Hirtzuka
Nick Jones
Paulette Kinsley
Vergio Kinsley
Jimmy Kinsley
Kathy Krutzes
Deanna Marvitoloff
Fran Monagan
Emma Nelson
Holmer Olsen
Simon Pusuruk
Villagers

9,037 feet
100 minutes

Alaska. Aegis Oil Company president Michael Jennings and his top troubleshooter Forrest Taft helicopter to the scene of an oil well fire, where Taft uses explosives to extinguish the blaze. He is accused by his old friend Hughie of selling out to the company. Later, Taft intervenes in a bar-room brawl to help a Native Alaskan who has been insulted by a roughneck. Meanwhile, Jennings films a TV advert which stresses Aegis Oil's

concern for the environment. It emerges that the rig and refinery have to be operational in 13 days or the oil rights will revert to the Native Alaskan population. Taft investigates the cause of the fire and discovers that defective blow-out preventers had been used. He notes that a shipment of new preventers will not make the deadline; the rig will cause a pollution disaster if it goes into operation using the defective equipment.

Jennings' henchman MacGruder and a sidekick torture and kill Hughie in a vain bid to discover the whereabouts of a computer file which details the company's malpractice. At a press conference, Jennings is questioned by the Native Alaskans and has oil thrown on him by Masu, the daughter of Chief Silook. Jennings persuades Taft to help him repair a sub-station fault. Arriving by helicopter, Taft finds Hughie's body in the plant just before it is detonated by remote control. Taft is rescued by the Native Alaskans; his wounds are treated by Silook and Masu, and the old man teaches him about the power of nature.

Silook is shot by MacGruder, who comes looking for Taft. Taking his leave of the dying old man, Taft travels to Hughie's house with Masu to recover the computer disc, running into a group of MacGruder's heavies as he retrieves it. Taft decides to destroy the new rig and heads off on horseback with Masu to his secret weapons dump. Meanwhile, Jennings has hired a group of contract assassins led by Stone. MacGruder, Stone and their team give chase, but Taft is able to blow up their helicopter. Taft and Masu escape and fight their way on to the rig. After picking off Jennings' men, including MacGruder, Taft confronts Jennings, who is still attempting to get the rig operational. Jennings falls to his death into the pool of crude oil below, and Taft and Masu make their escape as the rig explodes. At a hearing in the state capital, Taft makes a speech warning that big business will continue to pollute the environment so long as they can make a profit from it.

"We've got nothing on this guy before 1987," says one of the hired guns pursuing Forrest Taft. It could be taken as a wry reference to Steven Seagal's own rapid rise in the late 80s from obscure martial arts teacher to action movie superstar. This is Seagal's sixth film and the first in which he directs himself. However, one has to go back to his 1988 movie *Above the Law* to find a precursor of the crusading speech which concludes *On Deadly Ground*. There, just before the closing credits, Seagal's voice-over declaims sternly against those in high political office who consider themselves to be "above the law".

Above the Law was intriguing because as well as ably showcasing Seagal's martial arts skills - and including a clever autobiographical reference to his long sojourn in Japan - it pitted him against a CIA which was presented explicitly as having sanctioned mass

murder both in 70s South East Asia and contemporary Central America. The shallow contours of the 80s action movie were thus deepened and given a left-of-centre slant. In *Above the Law*, Seagal effectively announced himself as a new kind of action hero with a new brand of political consciousness.

In *On Deadly Ground*, Seagal carries forward that film's subversive promise and ambitious political reach by taking on the entire system of multi-national big business. The film is remarkable for its singleminded contempt for everything business stands for, personified by Michael Caine's corrupt, nostril-flaring villain Jennings. It's a strange theme for a project financed by a major Hollywood studio and it offers a bleak vision. Of course, Taft destroys the rig, but the grim speech and archive pollution footage suggest he's merely won one battle in a near-unwinnable war.

It is a brave way to end an action movie, but Seagal's star image has always been that of crusading hero who is simultaneously on the inside and on the outside of the institutions of power. He's always a wilful nonconformist due to his (heavily implied) experiences during the Vietnam era. And invariably, he rejects conventional Western values in favour of wisdom acquired in the East. *On Deadly Ground* conforms to these requirements, with Seagal the director employing an unfussy style to showcase his character's heroic stature. However, that image is broadened to include self-consciously mythic, nationalistic and Western hero dimensions.

Like a cavalry scout, Seagal's oil troubleshooter mediates between the worlds of the white man and the Native American. The film's stark presentation of industrial relations is also straight out of a Western, with Jennings as the scheming Easterner, Taft's doomed friend Hughie blatantly wearing his frontier integrity in the form of his checked shirt, and John McGinley and R. Lee Erney playing modern versions of the kind of callous hired guns Brian Donlevy and John Carradine would have played 50 years ago. However, as well as being a natural force and a Western-style hero, Taft is also

presented as a kind of intellectualised, left-field Rambo - but with none of Rambo's self-pity and moral confusion.

Above the Law included scenes set in the jungle of 1973 South East Asia; *On Deadly Ground* brings Vietnam-style warfare to the Alaskan wilderness. In his running battle with Stone's mercenaries, Taft deploys all the paraphernalia of jungle guerrilla combat: deadly booby traps, claymore mines, an M-16 rifle and plastic explosives. Unlike Rambo, Taft isn't emotionally scarred by his past experiences but strengthened by them. The implication is that the discipline of his martial arts - and the wisdom of Eskimo folklore - have allowed him to see through the corruption and confusion of modern life to a personal salvation. That, perhaps more than anything, is the key characteristic of Seagal's star image: his confidence both in his fighting abilities and his personal moral values.

Like John Wayne in the 50s and Clint Eastwood in the 60s, Seagal is despised by middlebrow critics who don't seem to realise that the deadpan humour in his work is intentional. Here, the fawning low camera angle which heralds his first appearance, a script in which the bad guys take turns in lavishly singing his praises and, above all, the scene in which he says, "I didn't want to resort to violence," before walking in a room packed with pre-positioned weapons, point to his parch-dry sense of humour. Of course the plot is wilfully absurd - Taft explodes an oil well to stop the pollution of Alaska - but an energetically absurd storyline has always been one of the prime requirements of an action movie. Here Seagal takes the formula by the scruff of the neck and throws it into challenging new territory.

Who else of the current crop of be-muscled action stars could convincingly turn a bar-room brawl into a learning experience and who else would dare end an action movie with a long, business-bashing speech? Steven Seagal may have a limited range as an actor, but within those limits, to quote from another fiery oil well movie, *Hellfighters*, he's "the best there is at what he does."

Tom Tunney



Parch-dry: Steven Seagal, Joan Chen

Painted Heart

USA 1992

Director: Michael Taav

Certificate

15
Distributor
 Metro Tartan
Production Company
 Second Son Publications Inc
Executive Producer
 Marc Glimcher
Producers
 Mark Pollard
 Randall Poster
Line Producer
 Charles S. Carroll
Associate Producers
 Susan Dupré
 Jennifer Vian Dennis
 Lynn Goldner
Production Co-ordinator
 Kathryn Takacs-Colbert
Location Manager
 Mark Von Holstein
Post-production Supervisor
 Susan Dupré
Casting
 Billy Hopkins
 Suzanne Smith
 Associate:
 Ann Goulder
Assistant Directors
 Kato Wittich
 Jeannette Scheibe
 Wendy Richardson
Screenplay
 Michael Taav
Director of Photography
 Robert Yeoman
 In colour
Graphic Artist
 Nan Pollard
Editor
 Nancy Richardson
Production Designer
 Mark Friedberg
Art Director
 Ginger Tougas
Set Decorator
 Stephanie Carroll
Set Dresser
 Julia Beale
Scenic Artists
 Charge:
 Wendy Margidian
 Steven Langenecker
 Cathy Cook
Storyboard Illustrator
 Paul Coyne
Music
 John Wesley Harding
 Additional:
 Jeff Charbonneau
Music Performed by
 John Wesley Harding
 The Sons of Bitches
 Drums/Percussion:
 Victor DeLorenzo
 Guitars:
 Jim Bannelli
 Mike Hoffman
 Bass:
 Duane Stuermer
 Connie Grauer
 Saxophone:
 Rip Tenor
 Additional Vocalist:
 Liz Lachman
Music Editor
 Jeffrey Charbonneau

Song

"I Want Everything"
 by and performed by
 Dean Wareham
Costume Design
 Wendy A. Rolfe
Wardrobe Supervisor
 Ursula 'Kiki' Schrader
Make-up/Hair
 Key:
 Patricia Schenkel
 Regan
 Additional:
 Sharon Giersch
Title Design
 Second Son, New York
Opticals
 Perpetual Motion
 Pictures
Supervising Sound Editor
 Douglas Murray
Dialogue Editors
 Sara Bolder
 Gwendolyn Yates
 Whittle
ADR Editor
 C.J. Appel
Sound Recordists
 Brit Warner
 Music:
 Les Brookman
 Ultra stereo
Sound Effects Editor
 James LeBrecht
Stunt Co-ordinator
 Joel Zolin

Cast

Will Patton
 Wesley
Bebe Neuwirth
 Margaret
Robert Pastorelli
 Willie
Cassy Stameszko
 Cal
Mark Boone Jr
 Tom
Jayno Haynes
 Mrs Thack
Richard Hamilton
 Robert
Jeff Weiss
 Mr Emilio
Everett Smith
 Dave
John Diehl
 Father
Dale Rolfe
 Mother
Cody Debon
 Child
Robert Brener
 White Wino
Otore H. Johnson
 Black Wino
Jim Kruse
 Derelict
Wendy Bastrup
 Sandwich Queen
Mark Pollard
 Vice Head
Henry Holmich
 Claude
Terry Lawler
 Claude's Customer

8,131 feet
 90 minutes

As a child, Willie is beaten by his father for indulging his "effeminate" artistic leanings with colouring crayons. 30 years later, in a Wisconsin small town, Willie runs a house-painting business and has a passionless marriage with his wife Margaret. One of Willie's employees, Wesley, is attracted to Margaret: he visits her while Willie is out and proves his love by cutting his arm with a knife. Meanwhile, Willie goes into town, where he offers drunken old men liquor and new clothes. These turn out to be the props he uses in a series of killings known as the Lipstick Murders.

Willie learns from his two other employees, Cal and Tom, that they suspect Wes of having a date. He probes Wes, who, anxious to protect Margaret, denies it. At the weekend, Willie backs out of the work gang's regular trip into town, claiming that he is taking Margaret to a dance, scuppering Wes' plan to take Margaret out himself. However, in town, Wes catches sight of Willie with a drunken old man. He follows the pair to a derelict house but is unable to see what happens inside.

Margaret refuses to see Wes, believing he stood her up, while Wes, convinced that there is something sinister in Willie's trips to town, sends him an anonymous letter claiming to know what he is up to. But Margaret opens the letter and, assuming it refers to the affair, leaves town. Finding his wife gone, Willie visits Wes' flat, but Margaret's departure is news to Wes too. The following day, Wes follows Willie into town and discovers his secret when he finds the body of an old man hanging on a wall, dressed in new clothes and with his face grotesquely made up.

Back home, Wes learns that Margaret has returned to Willie and tells her about the murder. As she is unwilling to listen he takes her to his flat and ties her up. He then goes to work where Willie, still suspicious of Wes, has arranged for the two of them to be alone. Willie confronts Wes, and sets about beating him up. Margaret escapes and follows Wes. When she arrives, Willie turns on her too, and is about to kill her when Wes kills him instead. Wes and Margaret wake up in hospital.

Will American cinema's sleepy small town ever return to being just sleepy? It would be something of a shock if it did, since the mere sight of a picket fence now sets alarm bells ringing. All the more so, when the fence appears in a film whose production notes claim comparison with David Lynch and the Coen brothers. *Painted Heart's* territory is that of plain folk who look for wisdom in radio phone-ins and for emotional cues in TV soaps; the land, in other words, where characters in plaid shirts are probably psychotic. Happily, writer/director Taav (here making his feature debut - his *Tom Goes to the Bar* won Best Short at Berlin in 1986) negotiates this familiar territory with skill and invention. He is less interested in intimating



Pastel-packing Pastorelli

that there might be something weird lurking within what looks ordinary than in having fun with the conventions of small-town psychodrama.

The traumatic childhood experience, regularly used to provide insight into the making of a murderer, here comes right at the beginning. The young Willie is beaten by his father for colouring in a newspaper advertisement for a tailor. Willie defies his father by becoming a house painter and a serial killer who hangs up the old men who are his victims like so many cut-out models, dressing them up and colouring their faces.

Taav's stretching of this cause and effect logic fits in with his arch portrait of backwater ways. The down-home wisdom has the hokiness of a muzak version of Country and Western. "It looks like you've been up all night crying some woman's name," Tom tells Wes. (Suitably, the soundtrack, scored by British rocker John Wesley Harding, offers its dramatic cues in italics). As the lovers, Bebe Neuwirth and Will Patton produce wonderful turns; while Margaret appears permanently startled ("Are you going to take me on a sexual joy ride?" she asks), Wes' expression is always on its way somewhere he's too slow ever to reach.

Excellent served by the production design and cinematography (the latter courtesy of Robert Yeoman, who photographed Gus Van Sant's *Drugstore Cowboy*), the story unfolds in a hyper-real suburbia. Courting Margaret, Wes gives her a pumpkin orange lipstick, the same vivid, synthetic colour which decorates the whole town as if it has been given a special paint job. The house painters are the heroes, and when Wes and Willie prepare to fight, they stride towards each other like cowboys, pots of gloss rather than shooters at their side. Taav renders this small-town strangeness with originality - at the local barbers, customers pay an extra dollar to press a buzzer when the scissors get too close; the radio station debates, "Is it really a dog-eat-dog world?", while an oddball walks around with his head in a vice. Tom and Cal, speculating on the reasons for the vice, decide that he's probably mad, finding, like the film, a pleasing logic: "Most people don't make sense until you realise they are lunatics."

Robert Yates

The Paper

USA 1994

Director: Ron Howard

Certificate

15
Distributor
 UIP
Production Company
 Imagine
 Entertainment for
 Universal Pictures
Executive Producers
 Dylan Sellers
 Todd Hallowell
Producers
 Brian Grazer
 Frederick Zollo
Co-producer
 David Koopp
Associate Producers
 Louisa Velis
 Aldric La'Auli Porter
Production Supervisor
 Michelle Weinberg
Production Co-ordinator
 Wendi Haas-Hammond
Unit Production Manager
 Carl Clifford
Location Manager
 Joseph E. Iberti
2nd Unit Director
 Todd Hallowell
Casting
 Jane Jenkins
 Janet Hirschenson
Assistant Directors
 Aldric La'Auli Porter
 Donald J. Lee
 Bill Connor
Screenplay
 David Koopp
 Stephen Koopp
Director of Photography
 John Seale
Colour
 Eastman Colour
Camera Operator
 Bruce MacCallum
Stand-in Operator
 Anastas Michos
Graphic Artist
 Joan Winters
Editors
 Daniel Hanley
 Michael Hill
Production Designer
 Todd Hallowell
Art Director
 Maher Ahmad
Art Department
Co-ordinator
 Trish Hoffman
Set Decorator
 Debra Schutt
Set Dressers
 Anthony Baldasare
 Michael Lee Benson
 Nancy Boytos-Amanuel
 Peter Gelfman
 Jerry Kadar
 Daniel Boy Kenney
 Raymond Murphy
 Marc Simon
 Mitch Towse
 Peter von Bartheld
Scenic Charge
 Jon Ringbom
Scenics
 Eva Davy
 June Decamp
 Ellen Doak
 Don Nace
 Greg Sullivan
Special Effects
Co-ordinator
 Hugo Cimmelli
Video Special Effects
 Michael Bedard
 James Davies
 Edward Gleason
Music
 Randy Newman
Orchestrations
 Jack Hayes
Music Supervisor
 Jane Lüttenberger
Music Editors
 Tom Kramer
 James Flamberg

Songs

"Make up Your Mind"
 by and performed by
 Randy Newman; "The
 One to Pay" by Jim
 Lang, performed by
 Mervyn Warren; "You
 Just Never Know" by
 Todd Hallowell, Jim
 Lang, performed by
 Rose Stone; "You've
 Been a Long Time
 Coming" by Brian
 Holland, Lamont
 Dozier, Edward
 Holland, performed
 by Marvin Gaye; "Lessons in Cha Cha"
 by Carillo Roman
 Marquez, Sergio
 Marmolejo,
 performed by Lester
 Lanin; "How You
 Satisfy Me" by Peter
 Kember, Richard
 Formby, performed
 by Spectrum; "Mend
 This Broken Heart" by
 Jim Lang, performed
 by Beth Hooker; "The
 Same Pain" by Jim
 Lang, performed by
 Sweet Pea Atkinson;
 "A Minute of Your
 Time" by Clive
 Westlake, performed
 by Tom Jones;
 "Youngblood" by
 M. Finding, D.
 Hussman, L. Sabin,
 L. Smith, performed
 by Slave Raider
Costume Design
 Rita Ryack
Key Make-up Artist
 Allen Weisinger
Make-up Artists
 Jean-Luc Ruscier
 Manlio Rocchetti
 Fern Buchner
Special Make-up
 Neal Martz
Key Hairstylist
 Joe Coscia
Hairstylists
 David Brian Brown
 Milton Buras
Alarm Clock Main Title
Sequence
 Director:
 Greg Ramsey
 Producer:
 George Fares
 Motion Control:
 Gizmo Special Effects
 Clock Model:
 Clockwork Apple, Inc.
Titles/Opticals
 Pacific Title
Supervising Sound Editors
 Anthony (Chic)
 Ciccolini III
 Lou Cerborino
Dialogue Editors
 Thomas A. Gulino
 Maddy Shirazi
Supervising ADR Editor
 Lisa J. Levine
ADR Editor
 Gerald Donlan
Foley Editor
 Dan Edelstein
Sound Recordists
 Danny Michael
 Music:
 Frank Wolf
 Music Advisor:
 Douglas Botnick
ADR Recordists
 Paul Zydell
 Dean Drabin
 Ann Hadsell
Foley Recordist
 Paul Zydell
 Dolby stereo
Sound Re-recorder
 Rick Dior

Sound Effects Editor
Maurice Schell
Foley Artist
Nancy Cabrera
Technical Advisers
Lauren Draper
Eugene Ferrara
Vincent M. Lee
John F. Rhodes
Jerry Rosa
Tonice Sgrignoli
Stunt Co-ordinator
Jeff Ward

Film Extract
The Toxic Avenger (1984)

Cost
Michael Keaton
Henry Hackett
Robert Duvall
Bernie White
Glenn Close
Alicia Clark
Marisa Tomei
Martha Hackett
Randy Quaid
McDougal
Jason Robards
Graham Keighley
Jason Alexander
Marion Sandusky
Spalding Gray
Paul Bladden
Catharine O'Hara
Susan
Lynne Thigpen
Janet
Jack Nance
Phil
Roma Maffia
Carmen
Clint Howard
Ray Blaisch
Geoffrey Owens
Lou
Amelia Campbell
Robin
Jill Hennessy
Deanne White
William Prince
Henry's Father
Augusta Dabney
Henry's Mother
Bruce Altman
Carl
Jack McGee
Wilder
Bobo Lewis
Anna
Edward Hibbert
Jerry
Michael Cowdryman
Emmett
Stobhan Fallon
Lisa
Joe Viviani
Max
Julio Donat
Kathy
Ed Jupp Jr
Copy Editor
Christi Hatcher
City Editor
Gary Dourdan
Copy Guy
James Ritz
Miles Watson
A.C. Repairman
Divina Cook
Sobbing Woman
Aloysius R. Burke
Parking Cop
Benny Bonowitz
Crazy Guy
Lee Nimball
Security Guard
Michael Moran
Chuck
Jack O'Connell
Press Operator
Herb Krystall
Pressroom Foreman
Herb Lovell
Victor
John Bentley
Paste-up Man

Vincent D'Arbouze
Michael Michael
Kids
Yvonne Warden
Woman with Dog
Louise Marie
Sentinel Receptionist
Stephen Koopp
German Newsperson
Victor Truro
Bernie's Doctor
Cedric Young
Wylie Weeks
Martha's Paramedics
James Colby
Alicia's Paramedic
Paul Geier
Doctor Porter
Rance Howard
Alicia's Doctor
Mourven Goldfeder
Alicia's E.R. Nurse
Karen Church
Alicia's Nurse
Diane Gagnarelli
Pediatric Nurse
David J. Wroblech
Anesthesiologist
Amos Grunbaum
Obstetrician
Vickie Thomas
E.R. Doctor
Jacqueline Murphy
O.R. Nurse
Joan Spogio Howard
Hospital Volunteer
Joseph Pontangalo
James Nestor
James Nestor
Arresting Officers
Jim Meekim
Tom
Tony Holy
Waiter
Sally-Jane Holl
Grace
Billie Sheehan
Richie
Herbert Rubens
Tony
Cheryl Howard
Redheaded Barmaid
Carol Ann Donohue
Crying Child
Shannon Donohue
Grumpy Child
Jeffrey H. Kaufman
Police Officer
Myra Taylor
Mother
Erica Johnson
Little Sister
Jan Mickens
Diner Owner
Daniel Kenney
Pinhead
Thomas Long
Bureaucrat
Harsh Mayyar
Attendant
Frank Iazzerillo
News Truck Driver
Rasanna Scott
Donna Hanover
Jane Hanson
Valerie Coleman
Chuck Scarborough
Bronx Blackman
Brenda Blackman
Cynthia Carter
E. Graydon Carter
Lou Colosonno
Bob Costas
Larry Naclett
Map Halstrom
Pete Howell
William Kenetler
Kurt Loder
Mike McNary
Joanna Melloy
Richard Price
John Rhodes
Jerry Rota
Linda S&S
Dial von Muffling
Joanna Williams
John Miller
Dabbie Gross Rodriguez
Themselves

10,071 feet
112 minutes



Hack attack: Michael Keaton

7 a.m. Henry Hackett, metro editor of the slightly yellow *New York Sun*, wakes up in the office to find that the city's other dailies have beaten the *Sun* on a front-page story: the apparently racially-tinged killing of two white businessmen in Brooklyn. His pregnant wife Marty, a former *Sun* reporter herself, presents him with a running dilemma - how to meet the needs of his family and those of the paper? On top of that, Hackett has a job interview at the *Sentinel*, an upmarket competitor; the move would mean higher pay and less low-grade newspaper thrills. In the newsroom, Hackett tries to find a quiet moment to sort out his life, as reporters, columnists and editors inundate him with questions. At the morning meeting in editor Bernie White's office, Hackett petitions for a deeper look into the slaying - for which two innocent black youths have been arrested - and has his usual run-in with managing editor Alicia Clark.

At his *Sentinel* interview, Hackett attempts to seduce information about the slaying from that paper's editor, rather than concern himself with getting the new job. Hackett sneaks a look at the editor's notes and reads the name of a belly-up savings-and-loan bank where the murdered businessmen had been executives. Back at his office, he works with a disillusioned *Sun* columnist, McDougal, to flesh out what may turn out to be a Mafia hit, while simultaneously having the arrest of the youths covered for the front page, in case he doesn't get the real story in time. The *Sentinel* editor, apprised of Hackett's unethical tactic, angrily withdraws his job offer.

Marty, suffering from pregnancy cabin fever, plumbs her own downtown connections and glimpses a list of the failed bank's investors, which includes the name of a prominent mobster. With this information, Hackett and McDougal go downtown to get confirmation from a reluctant cop that the arrest of the two kids is purely cosmetic. Hackett rushes back to change the front page celebrating their arrest to a headline announcing their innocence. Unfortunately, he is hours past deadline. Alicia has set the presses running, and Hackett crosses all professional boundaries by stopping them,

costing the paper thousands of dollars. Alicia fights with him hand-to-hand over control of the presses, and eventually fires him.

Later, Marty begins haemorrhaging and goes to the hospital. At the same time, Alicia and McDougal are in a bar wrangling over ethics when a city official disgruntled with McDougal's columns starts a fight and shoots at him. He misses and hits Alicia in the leg, just as she succumbs to a fit of conscience and tries to call the press room and get the front page switched to Hackett's headline. In the hospital, Marty gives birth to a son, and Alicia finally contacts the press room, setting the paper straight. The next day, everyone is reading the *Sun*, which for once has got the jump on the other papers.

Maintaining that Ron Howard is the most banal film-making mind in Hollywood is a bit like observing that grass is green - or at least the grass in his Irish epic *Far and Away*, which may stand as an acme of Industry muttonheadedness for some time to come. But, casting a cold eye on his films, from *Splash* through *Willow* and *Parenthood* to *The Paper*, one gets a sense that Howard is more than just a dull-witted, soap-watery Son of Spielberg whose clichéd films happen to cost \$30 million plus, and often gross many times more. More than that, Howard is television incarnate: he is Richie Cunningham, the character he played in the *Happy Days* series. His is a worldview shaped by canned laugh tracks, half-hour sitcom plot structure, deadpan reaction shots and backlot hometowns. Having simultaneously grown up on both sides of the TV screen - the "glass teat", as Harlan Ellison has called it - Howard has made millions suckling movie viewers thirsty for easy answers. The rhythms and easy huggability of his movies invoke a cultural subconscious mutated by the shorthand morality of Mayberry, Howard's hometown in *The Andy Griffith Show*. Even by James L. Brooks' standards, his films are equivalent in narrative depth to an episode of *Happy Days*.

For all its big-city brouhaha and teeth-gnashing about ethics, *The Paper* is more like a paragon of Howardism than an exception, however it may leap

ineffectively toward the Paddy Chayefsky shelf like a short kid jumping for the cookie jar. Mired in working-man toilet humour and New York Writer clichés (including the climactic visit to the too-famous White Horse Tavern, and cameos by Pete Hamill, Richard Price et al), Howard's movie paints with a broad brush, camouflaging with hard-bitten grit its inescapable cousinship to every newspaper movie since *The Front Page*. Michael Keaton's Hackett is the fast-talking newspaperman-with-ink-in-his-veins, Marisa Tomei's Marty is a loveable nag, Randy Quaid's McDougal is gruff, boozy and cynical. Robert Duvall's crusty editor with prostate problems is simply a gone-to-seed variation on Lou Grant.

Glenn Close's Alicia is perhaps the most appallingly simplistic character of all. Little more than her professional harpy of *Fatal Attraction* given a career change and a few months of therapy, Alicia is every working stiff's nightmare female boss, complete with big shoulders and a power complex. She's a paranoid, misogynistic vision from the 80s (she's even willing to sleep with Jason Robards to get ahead), and seemingly the speciality of co-screenwriter David Koopp, previously responsible for the cruel and/or laughable portraits of women in *Death Becomes Her*, *Carlito's Way* and *Jurassic Park*. But much of *The Paper* seems at least a decade old already; it's a belated twin to Brooks' own hellishly glib *Broadcast News*.

Like the Brooks movie, *The Paper* is also easy to suffer through, largely thanks to a cast that, without original characters, still manages to appear interested in the material. It couldn't have been easy, what with the annoying metrocentricism, self-satisfied pronouncements of newsroom slang, and neat, TV-style wrap-up. (A good headline seems to heal every sundered relationship in the movie.) For all *The Paper's* ostensible realism (one New York critic said the movie was about real newspaper work as much as the Road Runner cartoons were about wildlife in the American Southwest), the ghost of Paddy Chayefsky is summoned more than once in the chaos, which only serves to dwarf whatever dubious achievements Howard and the Koopps might have managed on their own. Chayefsky at his most ludicrous wouldn't have had editors fist-fighting over the press machines (Close gets slugged several times, and takes it like a man), and at his preachiest wouldn't have tied it all up with a bow for a heart-warming climax. He certainly wouldn't have had anyone literally shout "Stop the presses!". Howard may take on large, semi-serious topics, but he always intends to make cotton candy of them in the end. In the way nearly every scene squirms free from its seemingly inevitable interface with real life, you can tell Howard is struggling to remake the world into the one he knew as a pampered, telegenic child. In a very real sense, all of Howard's films are set in Mayberry, whether he realises it or not.

Michael Atkinson

Le Petit Prince a dit

France/Switzerland 1992

Director: Christine Pascal

Certificate
Not yet issued

Distributor
City Screen

Production Company
French Production (Paris)/Ciné Manufacture (Lausanne)

In association with
Alia Film
Télévision Suisse Romande

Producer
Robert Boner

Associate Producer
Emmanuel Schumberger

Production Manager
Marianne Monnier

Assistant Director
Manuel Flèche

Screenplay
Christine Pascal
Robert Boner

Director of Photography
Pascal Marti

In colour

Editor
Jacques Comets

Art Director
Pierre Cadéac

Music
Bruno Coulais

Music Director
Roger Berthier

Costume Design
Catherine Meurice
Adrienne Debessay

Make-up
Jean-Luc Russier

Hairstylist
Cédric Chami

Sound Editors
Dominique Vieillard
Jean-Pierre Laforce

Sound Recordists
Alice Lary
Anne Rizzo

Sound Effects Editors
Jean-Pierre Lelong
Mario Melchiorri
Jack Jullian

Specialists Consultants
Jean-Pierre Krahenbuhl
Georges Conne
Nicolas de Tribolet
Bernard Sordat
Charles Imsand

Cast
Richard Berry
Adam Leibovich
Anisoon
Mélanie
Marie Kleiber
Violette Leibovich
Lucio Phan
Lucie
Miata Prechac
Minerve
Claudio Muret
Jean-Pierre
Jean Cosmond
Otto
John Gutwirth
Victor
Baptiste Adatia
Young Man on Bus
Hugues Bonfils
Hotel Manager
Carlo Boso
Theatre Director
Sergio Colilla
Barbara DeRosa
Theatre Assistants
Beno Dhom
Christine Youllaz
Actors

9,540 feet
106 minutes

Subtitles

Violette Leibovich, the 10-year-old daughter of a happily divorced couple - Adam, a doctor, and Mélanie, an actress - is taken to stay with her mother while her father is in New York. On the way, she feels dizzy and collapses. On Adam's return, Mélanie berates him for not having noticed their daughter's condition earlier, and a medical examination is organised. During the examination, Adam secretly observes the images of the brain scan from the next room and eavesdrops on the doctors' conversation. It transpires that Violette has a brain tumour. Adam abducts her from the hospital and the pair take to the road. Staying in hotels, buying food from service stations, they travel to Milan to see Mélanie in rehearsal, and continue from Milan to Genoa. On the way, Violette's condition worsens. It is agreed that the family, including Adam's mistress Lucie and a stray dog adopted by Violette, congregate at the family house in Provence. There, the happy atmosphere is disrupted by the dog's disappearance, Adam's insistence that Lucie leave and by Violette's petulance. Finally, however, mother and father unite at their daughter's bedside as, exhausted by the evening's events, Violette falls asleep.

Legend has it that when asked why the Cinéma-thèque de Paris possessed a wall-to-wall screen, its founder Henri Langlois replied that it had been specially conceived "for the films of Renoir and Rossellini, because their shots have a tendency suddenly to burst out of the frame, upwards, downwards and to the sides". Films, in other words, that acknowledge their limitations in representing the chaotic flux of life. The formal attributes of deep-focus cinematography, and of replacing the scene with the shot in such movies became reified in Bazin's post-war theories of cinematic realism, contributing to the formation of a recognisably 'European' cinematic style, one concerned less with the three-act dictat of the narrative arch than with the contingent encounter and the appearance of improvisation.

This cinema has been described as less concerned with telling a story than illustrating a situation, and so it is with *Le Petit Prince a dit*, whose emphasis is more on character exploration than plot extrapolation. It is none the worse for it, when one considers the saccharine possibilities of the storyline: dad abducts terminally ill daughter from hospital for one last (broken) family reunion. When considered structurally, the film is a case of the episodic held together by the tragic, of events in thrall to the premise. But it is the delicacy and sly circumnavigation of the sentimental that allow it to deal with the intense self-consciousness that comes with a subject such as this, when every 15 minutes or so brings the possibility of Violette suffering a relapse or of fatality further postponed as the narrative pay-off.

The film's centrepiece is the 'voyage to Italy' that father and daughter undertake after her abduction. Wonderful moments here include the luminous rendition of the daughter's experience of transubstantiation, and a choking breakfast-table routine that manages to be both moving ("When am I going to die?" Violette asks her father over coffee as if she were asking to get down from the table) and knowing (the father wears dark glasses

throughout, and you want to see his eyes). It also features some of the best shots of out-of-season hotels in recent European cinema, with the exception of Wenders' *The State of Things*.

The journey originates in and arrives at versions of the same moment, that of the respective parents' reactions to the news of their daughter's condition. Each is 'staged' in a particularly telling way: the father's, appropriately enough, in a medical *mise en scène* with him surreptitiously watching and listening in on the brain scan via a tiny monitor in an adjoining room; the mother's moment played out on stage during her rehearsals in Milan, with both father and daughter present unobserved in the stalls. As academic as these scenes might sound, both moments work. What is it that is constrained by the monitor and proscenium arch alike? It's life, the free expression of the emotions and, in the case of the medical imagery, it is the body itself that is transformed and reduced. All those elements, in fact, that the cinema takes on in the task of representing life over death, whether it be the medical image of death that provokes the father's abduction, or the deathly masking of emotions paradoxically required of the mother on stage.

The emotional threads are tied together in the closing sequences in the family's country house, but this is not a straightforwardly feelgood finale. When Adam eases his mistress out of the domestic picture, for example, one senses that he knows that he is doing the right thing but is not 100 per cent happy about it. Likewise with Mélanie's hysterical, over-compensating gestures. All the good intentions of mother and father alike, volubly broadcast and exaggeratedly displayed, end up in tearful spats and broken glass. But things come right slowly on the verge of Violette's (final?) sleep. The film's resolute lack of sentimentality is crystallised in the penultimate shot of Adam's knuckles whitening as he kneads a pillow taken from his daughter's bed - as much an image of mercy-killing passion as of grief.

Chris Clarke

Qiuyue (Autumn Moon)

Hong Kong/Japan 1992

Director: Clara Law

Certificate
Not yet issued

Distributor
ICA Projects

Production Company
Trix Films

Executive Producers
Asian Beat:
Kohsuke Kuri
Kaizo Hayashi

Producers
Clara Law
Fong Ling Ching

Asian Beat:
Yoko Miyake

Line Producer
Kay Wong

Location Manager
Sam Tang

Assistant Directors
Ma Po Shan
Vincent Hung

Screenplay
Fong Ling Ching

Director of Photography
Tony Cheung

In colour

Editor
Fong Ling Ching

Art Director
Timmy Yip

Music
Lau Lee Tat, Tats

Make-up
Lee Wai Ming

Sound Recordists
Tat Leung
Wai Wong
Dolby stereo

Sound Re-recordists
Shin Fukuda

Sound Effects
Yukio Fukushima

Cast
Masabuchi Nagano
Tokio
Li Pui Wai
Wai
Choi Siu Wan
Granny
Miki Miki
Miki
Sonn Ching Hung
Wai's Boyfriend
Song Lap Young
Wai's Father
Tsang Yuet Gunn
Wai's Mother
Chu Kit Ming
Wai's Brother
Ang Ching Yee
Yue Sai Ting
Students
Ngai Wai Man
Detective
Lee Yee Ping
Hotel Woman

9,720 feet
108 minutes

Subtitles

On his first day visiting Hong Kong, Tokio, a young Japanese man, meets Wai, a fifteen-year-old girl, who lives with her grandmother. Her parents and elder brother are in Canada where they plan to immigrate, eventually bringing Wai over but leaving Granny behind. Tokio is in search of a good meal and appeals to Wai to take him to a good restaurant. She takes him to McDonalds, but after Tokio protests, she eventually takes him home, where Granny cooks him a meal. Tokio and Wai become friends. Later Tokio runs into Miki, the elder sister of an ex-girlfriend; the two go back to Tokio's bedsit and have sex.

Meanwhile, a rather shy Wai gives a love token to a boy she has a crush on at school. Tokio makes plans to meet up with Miki again, but stands her up. Instead he goes round to Wai's, where Granny cooks him another good meal. Wai tells Tokio about the boy at school and he gives his advice. Then suddenly, Granny is taken ill. Tokio stays with Wai and they look after Granny's cat. Wai explains that Granny won't be going with her to Canada because of the immigration policy on old people. The two visit Granny in hospital.

Later, Wai plucks up courage and asks the boy at school to the seaside. Tokio stays behind and visits Granny at hospital and videos her. She tells him that she knows that she is meant to stay behind and delivers a farewell speech to her family on camera. Moved by this, Wai meets up with Miki for solace and learns one or two things about her sister, his first love. Mean- ▶



Family plot: Marie Kleiber, Richard Berry



City flicker: Masatoshi Nagase

◀ while things are stilted between Wai and the object of her affections. Wai returns from the seaside to find that Granny is better again and back home. Her dad rings her from Canada - soon she will be joining her parents. Tokio and Wai go to an old deserted fishing village to commemorate the Chinese mid-autumn festival; their friendship is cemented amongst the celebratory fireworks display.

● In her director's statement, Clara Law declares, "Lately the word 'fading' keeps coming back to me." Shot in a water-pale light, *Autumn Moon* is most obviously an elaboration on that waning process, whether it be in Wai's moving away from her childhood, Tokio's leaving Japan or in the fact of Granny's life drawing to a close, while Hong Kong itself is being withdrawn from the West. These are all separate things which Law treats with some ambivalence. For the film's luminous surface also suggests that moment in the darkroom when photographic images begin to acquire definition. Certainly, by the wistful finale, when the screen erupts with the brilliant light of the fireworks, Law evokes a sense of epiphany, with a positive power attached to the honouring of certain traditions.

But Law finds just as much beauty in the city, which she perceives as some kind of concrete and glass monument to the twentieth century, with the old quarters tucked away from view (even the hospital that Granny stays in has a Corbusier line to it). The film hums and blips with new technology, and TV sets and Nintendo games flicker on and off throughout. Armed with his camcorder, Tokio (played by Masatoshi Nagase, from Jarmusch's *Mystery Train*) searches through the viewfinder to easily discover the visual parallels between Hong Kong and his namesake town. Conversely, he confesses to Wai that he has "come here to eat", and is in search of the authentic Chinese meal. It is with obvious irony that Wai takes him to McDonalds - but it is none the

less poignant in that the fast-food joint has become a place of tradition for the young girl. She tells Tokio that she has spent all her birthdays there, while worrying about the possibility of continuing such a ritual in her new homeland of Canada. Of course, Tokio finds his hunger abated when he is taken back by Wai to sample Granny's food, a meal in which Wai herself is patently uninterested.

In this way, Law asks what constitutes cultural traditions and who, in the age of migration, becomes custodian of them. Evidence of fragmentation of families - and consequently their cultures - pervades the film, from Wai and Tokio's stories to the Japanese woman Miki who declares that she has now found a happy independence having left her husband and children to start a life of her own in Hong Kong.

Law evidently mourns this potential loss of continuity. But her film is as much about understanding personal pasts as pasts of the community. It is a profound moment when Tokio becomes a surrogate grandson and videos Granny, as she calmly resigns herself to ending her days without her family around her. Her stoicism forces Tokio to confront what his island-hopping might mean. Frustrated at his inability to let out emotion, he wants to "cut open his head... know at least how to cry." It is only after pillow talk with Miki has helped him understand a former relationship that he sees his picture more clearly.

Meanwhile, the young Wai ponders on her future and, in a particularly wry moment, wonders what she might be doing at the grand old age of 20. Indeed, it is with nostalgia that Law herself ponders on such a sublime moment of adolescence, when the years seem to roll ahead with frighteningly uncertain promise. And it is perhaps with that same bitter-sweet feeling of anguish that Law anticipates the future of her country in this exquisitely elliptical film.

Lizzie Francke

Redheads

Australia 1992

Director: Danny Vendramini

Certificates

15

Distributor

Inner Eye Films

Production Company

Roxy Films

In association with

Australian Film

Finance Corporation

Executive Producer

Danny Vendramini

Producer

Richard Mason

Production Co-ordinator

Jennifer Cornwell

Production Manager

Julie Forster

Location Manager

Chris Strewé

Costing

Liz Mullinar

Consultants

Assistant Directors

Bob Howard

Guy Campbell

Brandon Howard

Screenplay

Danny Vendramini

Inspired by the play

Say Thank You to the Lady

by Rosie Scott

Director of Photography

Steve Mason

In colour

Camera Operator

Laurie McInnes

Stoodicam Operator

David Woodward

Opticals

Roger Cowland

Graphic Artist

Wendy Buick

Editor

Marc van Buuren

Production Designer

Ross Wallace

Art Director

Julianne White

Set Dresser

Lesley Crawford

Draughtsman

David Willett

Wayne Deakin

Scenic Artist

Leo Herringer

Special Effects

Co-ordinator

Reece Robinson

Music

Felicity Foxx

Music Producers

Felicity Foxx

Kirke Godfrey

Song

"Society Sux" by

Felicity Foxx, Margot

Smith, Kirke Godfrey

Costume Design

Ross Wallace

Wardrobe Supervisor

Helen Mains

Make-up/Hairstylist

April Harvey

Titles

Libby Blainey

Supervising Sound Editor

Gary O'Grady

Sound Editor

Karin Whittington

Sound Recordists

Max Bowring

Phil Heywood

Martin Oswin

Music:

Kirke Godfrey

Dolby stereo

Sound Re-recorderist

Simon Hewitt

Stunt Co-ordinator

Bob Hicks

Cast

Claudia Karvan

Lucy

Catherine McClements

Diana

Alexander Petersons

Simon

Sally McKenzie

Warden Zeida

Anthony Phelan

Inspector Quigley

Iain Gardner

McCoy

Mark Hombrow

Brewster

Jennifer Flowers

Carolyn

Malcolm Carr

TV Reporter

Charlie Barry

Fireman

Peter Grose

Officer O'Sullivan

Craig Cronin

Alex Sweetman

Constables

Anthony Hoffmann

Jacob Naman

Christopher Botta

Lawyers

Suzie McKenzie

Prostitute

David Widman

Newsreader

Michael Adams

Police Officer

Errol O'Neill

Magistrate

Larisa Chen

Kim Lee

Joie Vendramini

Jill

Della Vendramini

Belinda

9,699 feet

107 minutes

(Reviewed on video

9&S August 1993)

● Lucy is a tough young Australian delinquent, the victim of foster-homes and institutionalisation. In the midst of a video-sex session with her lawyer James Brewster (who also acts as her fence), an assassin arrives and shoots him as he answers the door. Lucy escapes, hiding the videotape in Brewster's washing machine, fearful that it would reveal her identity to the police. To further ensure her security, however, she gets herself arrested and taken back to Wattleghen Detention Centre.

For Lucy's newly-assigned legal-aid lawyer Diana Ferraro, the case represents a chance to disprove her trainee status, impress her Italian immigrant family, and cement a relationship with her romantically-inclined mentor, Simon. Lucy and Diana's relations are initially difficult, but improve when the young girl realises that Diana truly cares for her.

Meanwhile, the assassin has tracked Lucy down, and comes after her. Another inmate of Wattleghen is found dead - wearing Lucy's jacket. She survives a second attack, and uses Diana to effect an escape. The lawyer's initial scepticism is undone when the assassin launches an assault on Diana's own flat. The two try to recover Lucy's videotape, which should reveal the killer's identity. The new owner of Brewster's washing machine, however, is Simon, who runs a scam together with a corrupt policeman. Thwarted in their attempt to find the tape, Diana informs a television show of the crooked police/lawyer ring. Despite her recapture, Lucy refuses to sign a declaration against Diana. Diana finally locates the tape, whereupon the murderer's identity is discovered.



Cracking fun: Catherine McClements, Claudia Karvan

The only genuine redhead in Danny Vendramini's labyrinthine corruption thriller is lead actress Claudia Karvan, who plays the young delinquent Lucy. The fact, though, that 'Redheads' is a popular brand of Australian matches gives more of a clue to the film's intentions. An early slow-motion close-up of a flame being struck would have us believe that this is *Wild at Heart* territory – all dangerous emotion raging beneath apparently ordinary surfaces. But the director's vision is revealed as being rather more prosaic once it emerges that Lucy's favourite hobby is arson. It is the primary cause of her continuous confinement and her most clear-cut symptom of psychological dysfunction – that and her yearning resentment of her family-oriented lawyer.

Adapted from Rosie Scott's play *Thank You to the Lady*, *Redheads* proves to be construction-kit stuff in its delineation of its central relationships; and straight out of the Australian school of tortured social comment that spawned *Romper Stomper*. The Wattleleglen Detention Centre, where Lucy spends most of her time, is conceived as a cartoon of a borstal – packed with sneering adolescents and splattered over with punkish graffiti. Novice lawyer Ferrara, wholesome and honest, conversely inhabits a world of mobile phones, shiny sports cars and white-wine-and-soda. When the two are forced together – as a result of Ferrara's thirst to uncover an apparent conspiracy between the police and the prosecution service – the development of mutual respect and understanding becomes the issue in the foreground.

Another of Vendramini's themes dictates the stylistic meat of the film: the proliferation and intrusion of mass-media and television in contemporary society. Hence there is a continuous exploitation of different kinds of camera: from the camcorder sex of the opening assassination scene, through the closed-circuit surveillance in the Centre, to the part played by the local TV station in the unmasking of the killer. The cinematography elsewhere is conspicuous by its heightened tone, bulking out the plot with spectacular interior lighting, calculatedly expressionist shot-making and a perceptible resolve to work right to the limits of the relatively small production budget (1.6 million Australian dollars).

In the end, though, it is over-arching ambition that creates the most problems. By opening up a myriad sub-plots and sub-themes, Vendramini is forced to surrender to the helter-skelter pace of piecing together the narrative itself. On the track of a nameless killer in a black crash-helmet, conspiracies, escapes and legal corruption all rise up to provide a basketful of red herrings that end up throwing the direction more off course than the audience. The curious perfunctoriness of the opening half's exposition (of characters, locales, atmospheres) gives way to an equally perfunctory denouement as the film dashes headlong to its close.

Andrew Pulver

Romeo is Bleeding

USA 1992

Director: Peter Medak

Certificate

18

Distributor

Rank

Production Company

A Working Title Films

production for

PolyGram Filmed

Entertainment

Executive Producers

Tim Bevan

Eric Fellner

Producers

Hilary Henkin

Paul Webster

Co-producer

Michael Flynn

Production Co-ordinator

Michele Giordano

Unit Production Manager

Carl Clifford

Location Managers

Joseph Iberti

Michael Stricks

Post-production Supervisor

Leslie Leitner

Casting

Bonnie Timmerman

Voice:

Barbara Harris

Assistant Directors

Mark McGann

Michael DeCasper

Juan Ros

Screenplay

Hilary Henkin

Director of Photography

Dariusz Wolski

Colour

DeLuxe

Aerial Photography

Don Sweeney

Camera Operator

Phil Oetiker

Steadicam Operator

Jim McConkey

Editor

Walter Murch

Production Designer

Stuart Wurtzel

Art Director

W. Steven Graham

Art Department Co-ordinator

Patricia Hofmann

Set Decorator

Beth A. Rubino

Set Dressers

Michael Lee Benson

Jerry Kadar

Michael Leather

Scenic Artists

Head:

Jon Ringbom

Camera:

Peter Hackman

Special Effects Co-ordinator

Steve Kirshoff

Special Effects

Wilfred Caban

Mark Berg

Music

Mark Isham

Music performed by

Romeo's Industrial

Art Ensemble

Trumpet/Electronics:

Mark Isham

Bass:

Chuck Domanico

Drums:

Kurt Wortman:

Piano:

David Goldblatt

Music Supervisors

Dana K. Sand

Jennifer Richardson

Music Editor

Tom Carlson

Music Consultant

Sharon Boyle

Songs

"I Know Better Now"

by and performed by

A.J. Croce: "In the Good

Old Summer Time":

"Cha Cha Momma"

by Phil Marshall: "Bird

Alone" by and

performed by Abbey

Lincoln: "The Big

Swing" by

Phil Marshall

Costume Design

Aude Bronson-Howard

Wardrobe Supervisors

Susan J.W. Wright

Mark Burchard

Make-up Artists

Kathryn Bihl

Ronnie Specter

Andrea Miller

Bernadette Mazur

Special Make-up Effects

Neal Martz

Richard Alonzo

Hairstylists

Hiram Ortiz

Aaron F. Quarles

Titles/Opticals

Pacific Title

Supervising Sound Editor

Dane A. Davis

Dialogue Editors

Martin J. Bram

Kimberly Lowe Voigt

ADR Supervisor

G.W. Brown

Foley Editors

Tom Hammond

Kurt N. Forshager

Sound Recordists

Gary Alper

Mark Harris

Music:

Stephen Krause

ADR/Foley Recordists

Robert Deschaine

Tommy Goodwin

David Jobe

Tami Treadwell

Dolby stereo

Consultant:

Steve F.B. Smith

Sound Re-recordists

Walter Murch

Matthew Iadarola

Digital/Analog Transfers

Charles W. Ritter

Zigmund M. Gron

Sound Effects Editor

Todd Toon

Foley Artists

Catherine A. Harper

Ossama Khuluki

Stunt Co-ordinator

Jerry Hewitt

Stunts

Janet Papparazzo

Norman Douglas

Cast

Gary Oldman

Jack Grimaldi

Lena Olin

Mona Demarkov

Annabella Sciorra

Natalie Grimaldi

Juliette Lewis

Sheri

Roy Scheider

Don Falcone

Wallace Wood

Waiter

David Preval

Scully

Will Patton

Martie Cuchinski

Gene Canfield

Detective John

Beechum

Larry Johnson

Detective Joey Tate

Michael Wincott

Sal

William Duff-Griffin

Paddy

James Cromwell

Cage

Paul Butler

Federal Agent Skouras

Tony Sirico

Malacci

Victoria Bastol

Katrina Rae

Girls

Joe Paparone

GINNY

Owen Hollander

Stan

Neal Jones

Clerk

James Marlingham

Priest

Gary Hope

Driver

Americo Mongiello

James Mongiello

Men

Ron Portman

Jack's Attorney

9,855 feet

109 minutes

Jack Grimaldi, sitting in a diner in the Arizona desert, reminisces about the events which led to his virtual disappearance from the face of the earth. His voice-over takes us back a few years to his time as a New York police officer, on loan to the Organized Crime Force, who spends his time in surveillance of mobsters. Happily married and seemingly dedicated to his job, he nonetheless has a sneaking suspicion that the mafia hoods he watches every day have a richer, more exciting time than he does. Deciding he wants a slice of the action, he ends up selling information to mob boss Don Falcone. This results in the assassination of a gangster on the witness protection programme, but also leads to the deaths of several of Jack's colleagues.

Jack collects his cash from a post box, hides it in a hole at the bottom of his garden, and doesn't mention it either to his wife Natalie or to his mistress Sheri. Don Falcone has a vicious new rival, his former lover, Mona Demarkov. The Feds capture her, and Jack is assigned to protect her. Falcone wants her dead, and offers him money to reveal her whereabouts. Jack takes her to a seedy, downtown motel, where she seduces him; the Feds burst into the room, and he is caught in flagrante delicto. He tells Falcone where she is being held, but before the mob can act, she manages to escape. Falcone tells Jack that unless he guarantees Mona's death, he will be killed himself. A few days later, at a mob funeral, Falcone has his henchmen chop off one of Jack's toes. Panicking, Jack returns home, confesses to Natalie, and tells her about the money he has stashed away. She agrees to disappear, and the couple arrange to meet in a few months' time in an Arizona diner. Meanwhile, Jack breaks off his affair with Sheri, whom he also persuades to leave town.

Mona offers Jack a small fortune to double-cross Falcone and fake the details of her death. She picks him up in her car, but, rather than give him the cash in exchange for fake ID papers, tries to strangle him. After a struggle, in which Jack shoots her and the car crashes, she manages to escape. Staking out the house where his mob contact Sal is hiding, Jack sees Mona and Sal in conversation; he rushes in and shoots a woman, whom he presumes to be Mona, only to discover he has killed Sheri.

Mona takes him prisoner. She has also captured Falcone, and forces Jack to dig a grave and bury Falcone alive. She allows Jack a chance to escape, but

he fails to take it, and is arrested by his own former colleagues and charged with most of Mona's crimes. She plans to testify against him. Passing her in the court building, he grabs a gun and shoots her. Instead of being punished for the murder, he is acclaimed as hero and given a new identity. Back in the present day, he is still in the diner, endlessly waiting for Natalie to turn up.

Long before it was ever filmed, Hilary Henkin's screenplay for *Romeo is Bleeding* was being touted as "one of the ten best unproduced scripts in Hollywood." At least on paper, it had all the hallmarks of a contemporary film noir classic, with its labyrinthine plot, laconic dialogue, powder-keg mix of obsession, lust and greed, not to mention its dark philosophising about human nature, its even darker comedy, and its Gilda-like femme fatale heroine. It was just the kind of vehicle you could imagine Tourneur or Lang directing – the type of film which used to be shot in moody black and white, with chiaroscuro lighting, a craggy leading man and Barbara Stanwyck or Joan Crawford as the Circe luring him to his doom.

Unfortunately, the picture which has actually been made never really clicks. Neither the visual style nor the performances do justice to the material, and the whole affair seems horribly self-conscious, too aware of its own out-of-the-past cleverness to establish an identity of its own.

The story opens deep in the desert. Here, a grizzled Gary Oldman, in denim and white T-shirt, and looking like a refugee from a jeans commercial, recounts in flashback the whole sorry sequence of events which have led to his being stuck in the middle of nowhere. This is yet another tale of a corrupt cop, following in the patrol path of *Bad Lieutenant*, *Unlawful Entry* and a spate of movies stretching as far back as *Serpico*. Oldman is always watchable, but he is too febrile and expressive an actor for his role as Jack Grimaldi, and probably too young as well. The part demands a dour, phlegmatic sort, somebody like Robert Mitchum, who could sleepwalk his way through the action and throw away lines like "You walk around like you're somebody special. You're riding high in April... Then life sends you Mona Demarkov" in best deadpan fashion. Instead, Oldman fidgets and frets, and when he has his toe lopped off, hobbles and hops. Opposite him, Lena Olin plays the ruthless Mona Demarkov as a high camp villainess, a sort of cross between Catwoman and Ma Baker. Often dressed more or less as she was in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* (minus the bowler hat), she is much given to manic giggles as she commits each fresh atrocity, and is so cheerfully amoral that she ends up as an almost comic figure.

Director Peter Medak struggles to find a pitch for the film. On the one hand, he wants to make a hard-boiled urban cop thriller, where the violence is every bit as jolting as in *The Krays*, ▶

and where he can establish his credentials as a Scorsese imitator. On the other, he wants to keep matters light-hearted, and to extract the black comedy from the script. As a consequence, in the more bloody scenes, we don't know whether we're supposed to grimace or laugh. At one point, Jack shoots Mona after she tries to strangle him. She is lying prostrate in the back of the car, presumably bleeding to death, but suddenly develops some superhuman energy, grips Jack's head in a vice with her legs and, when the car crashes, clambers through the shattered windscreen, and limps off ridiculously into the distance.

This is real Jacobean revenge theatre stuff, lurid and extremely hammy, which typifies the film's wayward surrealism. The narrative is frequently interrupted by dream or fantasy sequences. Jack proves a less than reliable storyteller, sometimes skipping ahead of himself and then hastily backtracking. Such self-conscious stylisation works in itself, but can't help undermining scenes where Medak wants us to feel sympathy for the characters.

The movie shifts uneasily from low-key naturalism to comic fantasy, as if the director hasn't made up his mind which style he prefers. There is a fine gallery of character actors on display, but Medak seems uncertain how to use them. Too often, he simply resorts to old clichés: the sturdy, reliable cops sit off-duty in the diner, swapping manly tales, as if to underline their camaraderie, while mafia hoodlums gobble down vast bowls of pasta or expound pretentious philosophies about the 'art' of crime. From subway to warehouse, from mob funeral to fairground, every backdrop is familiar. Without the aid of black and white photography, the film-makers struggle to create a menacing atmosphere. Mark Isham's laid-back score does nothing to crank up the tension. Juliette Lewis, as Grimaldi's mistress, is a mere cipher, and Roy Scheider, going through the motions as Don Falcone, seems relieved when Mona decides to bury him alive. Grimaldi's divided loyalties, his relationship with the wife he claims to love, and his efforts at preserving a cosy domesticity, even as he sinks further into a quagmire of corruption, provide some sort of dramatic tension. But it is not enough to sustain a film which often seems as aimless as the Marie Celeste.

Geoffrey Macnab



Infernal affairs: Oldman, Olin

La Scorta

Italy 1993

Director: Ricky Tognazzi

Certificate

Not yet issued

Distributor

Merro Tartan

Production Company

Claudio Bonivento Productions

Producer

Claudio Bonivento

Production Supervisors

Giorgio Innocenti

Mauro de Salve

Anna Maria Galvinelli

Production Manager

Massimo Martino

Assistant Directors

Ferzan Dzperék

Maria Sole Tognazzi

Daniele Casella

Screenplay

Graziano Diana

Simona Izzo

Based on an idea

by Stefano Sudrié,

Giovanni Romoli

Director of Photography

Alessio Gelsini

Colour

Alessio Gelsini

Technicolor

Steadicam Operator

Dante Dalla Torre

Editor

Carla Simoncelli

Production Designer

Mariangela Capuano

Special Effects

Giovanni Corridori

Music/Music Director

Ennio Morricone

Music Performed by

Orchestra Sinfonica

Unione Musicisti

di Roma

Contralto Sax:

Rosario Giuliani

Violincello:

Giorgio Ravenna

Trumpet:

Francesco Santucci

Flute:

Paulo Zampini

Orchestrations

Ennio Morricone

Music Co-ordinator

Enrico De Melis

Costume Design

Catia Dottori

Make-up

Stefano Fava

Hairdresser

Iolanda Angelucci

Titles/Opticals

Penta Studio

Sound Editor

Filippo Bussi

Sound Recordist

Remo Ugolinelli

Sound Mixer

Daniilo Moroni

Music:

Franco Patrignani

Dolby stereo

Dolby

Dubbing

Grupo Trenta

Sound Effects

Sound Track snc di

Anzellotti

Cast

Claudio Amendola

Angelo Mandolesi

Enrico Lo Verso

Andrea Corsale

Carlo Cecchi

Judge Michele de

Francesco

Ricky Memphis

Fabio Muzzi

Leo Gallo

Policeman

Tony Sperandio

Raffaele Frasca

Angelo Infanti

Judge Barresi

Ugo Conti

Nicola

Francesca D'Alma

Anna Spano

Lorenzo Indovino

Lia Corsale

Rita Savagnone

Angelo's Mother

Giovanni Alania

Squealer

Giovanni Pallavicino

Padre Virzi

Romoldo Ranoli

President Caruso

Luigi Maria Iurruano

Informant

Claudio Bonivento

Roberta de Francesco

Francesco Siciliano

Policeman Marchetti

Giacinto Ferro

M.P. Nestore Bonura

Davide Caruso

Magistrate

Davide Corsale

Renzo Greco

Bonura's Wife

Guido Jelo

Rosalina Carabba

Salvo Maagione

Magistrate

Mimmo Mignoni

Maresciallo

Marco Magnolia

Mattia Corsale

Antonino Panabone

Vice-Prefect Scavone

Ninni Piconi

Janitor

Elda Alvirgini

Milena

Maurizio Romoli

Judge Pollara

Santi Bollina

Salvatore Genna

Claudio Spadaro

Farina

Tony Sperandio Inv

Igor Corsale

8,280 feet

92 minutes

Subtitles

Trapani, Sicily. Special investigator Judge Rizzo is assassinated along with his escort, *carabiniere* Pietro Virzi. Angelo Mandolesi, a colleague and friend of Virzi's, requests a transfer from Rome back to his native Sicily to take the dead man's place. In the barracks he meets a younger policeman, Fabio Muzzi, who is hoping for a safe posting. But both Angelo and Fabio, along with the easy-going Raffaele Frasca, are detailed to escort the newly-arrived investigator, Michele de Francesco. The team is headed by a sergeant, Andrea Corsale, a family man whose wife Lia fears for his safety. The

escort's jumpiness is exacerbated by the inadequate equipment they have been issued with.

Promised every assistance by local prosecutor Caruso and his assistant Polizzi, de Francesco starts to investigate a scam involving water-wells controlled by a local landowner, Mazzaglia. He sequesters the wells, but when a water shortage hits the town he incurs widespread criticism and the hostility of Caruso and his staff. Angelo angrily confronts Andrea, who he realises is secretly reporting to Caruso. Andrea shamefacedly confesses his duplicity to de Francesco, who forgives him. At dinner at Andrea's apartment, the judge and all four of his escort are united in a bond of loyalty.

Relying solely on his escort for assistance, de Francesco unearths evidence implicating the vice-prefect Scavone and the local senator Nestore Bonura in the Mafia-led corruption. Vital documents go missing from the judge's desk, but Polizzi and his colleagues indignantly deny responsibility. While de Francesco is busy, the escort take his daughter Roberta, plus Lia and her children, to the seaside; as they prepare to return, Raffaele's car blows up, killing him. Fabio, whose transfer has come through, elects to stick with the team, and together with the judge they move into a bunker-like concrete apartment.

Through an informer, Angelo traces one of Rizzo and Virzi's killers, who accuses Mazzaglia and Senator Bonura. De Francesco raids the offices of everyone involved, the senator included. Soon afterwards, Bonura and his escort are gunned down. Caruso holds de Francesco responsible for the killing and contrives to have him transferred away from Sicily. On the quayside the escort team, all now assigned to menial duties, take an emotional farewell of the judge.

For a film so concerned with death, *La Scorta* has a modest body count: a mere two killings, barring the pre-credit sequence. The judge, the supposed target, doesn't once come under attack; and the expected climax, the big set-piece shoot-out where the escort lay their lives on the line to protect their charge, never happens. Instead, director Tognazzi maintains the tension by conveying a constant sense of potential death, showing through the escort's eyes how the most innocuous objects – a parked car or an old lady at a window – can seem a source of latent menace. At moments of maximum stress, the camera itself joins the escort team, panning wildly from side to side, checking every angle for hidden danger. The one time they relax – the seaside trip – is when violence strikes.

We're also deprived of another expected big scene, the triumphant round-up of all those involved in the conspiracy. Bonura dies, Caruso takes early retirement, and we never learn what happens to Mazzaglia, the local *capo di mafia* – the implication is, not



Watching the detectives: D'Aloja, Amendola

very much. Danger is omnipresent but so too is complicity, subverting authority and justice and seeping like a noxious gas into every crevice of society. At one point Angelo, busily phone-tapping, calls de Francesco to report a conversation he's just overheard. A moment later his own phone rings, and a voice contemptuously corrects a detail he got wrong. The tappers are being tapped, the watchers are being watched, and *La Scorta* is too honest a film to pretend that the efforts of five individuals will have more than minimal impact on the all-pervasive corruption. Their only achievement is personal, in terms of their own maturity and emotional development.

For what *La Scorta* is about, no less than the battle with the Mafia, is family. "I don't like this family business," says de Francesco, referring to the way Caruso's staff close ranks against the outsider; but what he does in response is form a surrogate family of his own. The film's key scene is the dinner to which Andrea invites his fellow escorts and the judge, whose own private life is in tatters. (His wife has left him, and we see him dolefully trying to cook according to phoned instructions from his mother.) Around the domestic table, laden with pasta and wine, a new extended family is created, and once Andrea's wife and children are safely out of the way the men forge an even closer bond: the good father and his four loyal sons. When the going gets still tougher, they even set up house together.

Tognazzi himself describes the film as "a great love story between men". Nothing gay, of course; sound, if sketchy, hetero attachments are provided for the unmarried team members, and the only openly gay character, an informer, is depicted as a cringing sleazeball. But despite lip-service to traditional Italian machismo ("To have kids with balls, only kiss them when they're asleep"), the men are tender with women and children as well as with each other. In this, they're opposed to the bad family of the Mafia that subsists on greed and cruelty, and it's only through relationships like theirs, Tognazzi implies, that the sickness at the heart of Italian society can eventually be overcome. Though it ends in a defeat, *La Scorta's* long-term message is one of cautious optimism.

Philip Kemp

Sonatine

Japan 1993

Director: Takeshi Kitano

Certificate

18

Distributor

ICA Projects

Production Companies

Right Vision/Right Vision Entertainment/
Bandai Visual/
Shouchiku Daichi Kougyo/
Office Kitano

Executive Producer

Kazuyoshi Okuyama

Producers

Masayuki Mori
Hisao Nabeshima
Takio Yoshida

Production Associates

Yoshihisa Nakagawa
Hiroyuki Misoka
Ritta Saito

Production Manager

Satoshi Fukushima

Unit Production Manager

Kenichi Kanda

Location Managers

Hiroyuki Kobayashi
Tatsuro Makiyama
Sasutada Sunagawa
Masako Ikeda
Ryo Murayama

Assistant Directors

Toshihiro Tenma
Masahiro Kitahama
Hiroyuki Shimizu
Akira Osaki
Akinori Igarashi

Screenplay

Takeshi Kitano

Director of Photography

Katsumi Yanagishima

In colour

Assistant Photography

Hideo Yamamoto
Masato Kaneko
Shigeki Murano
Kazuhiya Sekiya

Lighting Consultant

Hitoshi Takaya

Opticist

Masashi Nakamura

Background Artist

Masataka Shoji

Editor

Takeshi Kitano

Art Director

Osamu Sasaki

Set Decorator

Hirohide Shibata

Music

Joe Hisaishi

Wardrobe Supervisors

Alen Mikudo
Junichi Goto

Make-up

Kyoko Toyokawa

Special Make-up Effects

Tomoo Haraguchi

Hisashi Oda

Talent

Ryoji Kasumi

Title Design

Masato Aizawa

Sound Recordists

Senji Horiuchi

Music:

Suminobu Hamada

Dolby/stereo

Sound Effects

Yukio Hogari

Armourer

Yoshiaki Minami

Tasturo Tsugana

Cast

"Beet" Takeshi (Takeshi Kitano)

Murakawa

Ayo Kokumai

Miyuki

Tetsu Watanabe

Uechi

Masanobu Katsumura

Ryoji

Sosumu Terashima

Ken

Ron Ohsugi

Katagiri

Yosho Zushi

Kitajima

Kenichi Yajima

Takahashi

Eiji Minakata

The Hit Man

2,442 feet

94 minutes

Subtitles

Murakawa is a world-weary gangster, listlessly going through the motions of extorting, racketeering and murdering. When warfare breaks out between two rival *yakuza* gangs, his boss Kitajima instructs him to lead a team of hoodlums to Okinawa to help resolve the dispute. Murakawa is unenthusiastic about the mission, and has grave suspicions about Kitajima's lieutenant, Takahashi. Shortly after Murakawa's arrival in town, a bomb explodes in his offices, killing two of his colleagues. More of his team die when a gunfight breaks out in a bar. The chief of the Anan clan claims that Murakawa's services aren't really needed; the war between Anan and Nakamatsu is a trivial dispute which could easily have been ironed out without Kitajima's help.

Rather than risk further casualty, Murakawa and the surviving gang members decide to hide out in a remote beach-house. Awaiting further instruction, they while away the time, shooting frisbees on the beach, playing cards and mock games of Russian roulette, dancing, drinking and pretending to be sumo wrestlers. One

evening, Murakawa witnesses a man attempting to rape his wife on the dunes; the man accuses him of being a voyeur and Murakawa kills him in self-defence. In the following days, Murakawa strikes up a relationship with the woman, Miyuki, and she joins his entourage.

The seaside idyll comes to an abrupt end when an assassin massacres the leaders of the Anan clan as they hold a secret meeting, and then appears on the beach and shoots a member of Murakawa's team. Murakawa learns that he and his followers have been 'expelled' by the boss, and that Takahashi has turned up in Okinawa, ostensibly to broker a truce. Murakawa and his men rush to Takahashi's hotel; a gunfight ensues in which Murakawa, one of his followers, and Takahashi are the sole survivors. Murakawa and his cohort take Takahashi back to the beach-hut and torture him. He confesses that Murakawa's entire mission was really just a smokescreen to distract attention while Kitajima discarded his old Anan partners and made a deal with Nakamatsu: Kitajima is due to meet the leader of the Nakamatsu clan to ratify their agreement.

Murakawa and his follower kill Takahashi, then head back to town. They arrange to fuse the lights in the hotel suite where the meeting is to take place. Murakawa sneaks into the hotel and ambushes the crooks, killing Kitajima and most of the Nakamatsu clan. After the shoot-up, he drives back towards the beach-house, where Miyuki is waiting for him, but stops on the road and blows his brains out.

A sort of elegy for a doomed *yakuza*, Takeshi Kitano's exquisite gangster film starts in familiar key as hard-boiled urban thriller, with all the shoot-and-splatter energy of his debut, *Violent Cop*. But it then veers off in a different direction altogether, turning into a lyrical, rather contemplative beach-movie: the narrative is held in suspension as our off-duty hoodlums hole up in a secret coastal resort. Here, to while away the time, they meditate and play: they don ancient costumes, perform traditional dances, and even have a few mock bouts of sumo wrestling in the sand. Kitano may specialize in making crime films, but he began his career as a comedian, and his deft way with visual gags and slapstick is given full rein: the beach sequences have a freewheeling, improvisatory charm utterly at odds with the stylized, very formal gunfights of the early scenes.

To match the good-spirited antics of the gangsters-at-leisure, the film-making itself becomes more flamboyant, using stop-action, slow motion and an array of high-angle shots. The games seem like harmless fun, but they have at least a tenuous relationship with the more serious business of the plot: they all involve guns or conflict of some sort. As they gambol in the sand, shooting flares at one another, playing Russian roulette, it's as if Kitano's characters are providing their own ironic

commentary on their lives as racketeers while he gently mocks and stretches genre conventions, which usually demand that the violence be 'for real.'

The seaside interlude isn't simply a coda, but takes up the greater part of the film. In the space of a few minutes, we move from a tautly scripted mainstream thriller into the realm of the art-house movie. Suddenly, mood and atmosphere appear more important than narrative drive: there are self-consciously poetic shots of waves, long country roads and beautiful nighttime skies. However, even if it has been kept in abeyance for long periods, the storyline has been scrupulously worked out, and comes complete with all the twists, turns and betrayals demanded of the well-constructed gangster pic. It only takes the smallest of catalysts to set the whole bloody chain of events back in motion. Throughout the idyllic seaside lull, Kitano never lets the audience forget why his characters have gone into hiding. Nor is the possibility of renewed violence ever far away.

"If you're dead scared, it's like having a death wish," Murakawa (played by Kitano himself) tells his girlfriend Miyuki. There is a large measure of pathos in Murakawa's tale. He has grown tired of his life as a *yakuza*, and wants to move on; but it's a generic convention that he won't be allowed to, that he'll have to stay a gangster right till the bitter end. Kitano has a wonderful clown's face, and, as he showed playing the Sergeant in Oshima's *Merry Christmas, Mr Lawrence*, he's expert at suggesting a gentle, melancholy side in even the least sympathetic types.

Still, as a director, Kitano isn't much interested in characterization. All the figures in the film are one-dimensional stereotypes, defined by their roles. They're simply pawns in some bigger scheme of things, and behave as they must. Kitano even underlines the fact, cutting from the hoodlums playing a game with paper warriors to a pair of them wrestling on the beach, moving in the same rigid, mechanical way as the models. The gunfights are like rituals. Nobody betrays the slightest emotion, or shows anything other than an impassive expression, when they get caught in a scrap. There are several extremely bloody shoot-outs dotted through the film, most of them mounted with an ingenuity which will probably soon have the great magpie Tarantino scurrying to copy them. (*Sonatine's* denouement is especially effective: it's a kind of shadow-play, where all the lights have been fused, and we simply see the silhouettes of the killer and his victims illuminated by gunfire.) It is to Kitano's credit that the film never seems a coldly formalist exercise, despite the games he plays with genre: *Sonatine* is both rooted in a Japanese tradition of storytelling and very aware of the Hollywood gangster cycle, but, whatever its antecedents, the picture's sheer verve and originality are all its own.

Geoffrey Macnab

Stalingrad

Germany 1992

Director: Joseph Vilsmaier

Certificate

15

Distributor

Entertainment

Production Companies

Royal Film/Bavaria

Film/B.A.

Productions/Perathon

Executive Producers

Mark Damon

Michael Krohne

Producers

Joseph Vilsmaier

Hanno Huth

Gunter Rohrbach

Production Managers

Richard Pasky

Gerhard Jakubowski

Czechoslovakia:

Pavel Novy

Finland:

Stinia Laakso

Unit Managers

Silvia Tollmann

Filip Hering

Andreas Wolffhardt

Felicita Nowak

Czechoslovakia:

Emil Sirotek Jnr

Ales Tybel

Jaroslav Cipera

Jukka Heinonen

Assistant Director

Milan Steindler

Screenplay

Johannes Heide

Jürgen Busche

Joseph Vilsmaier

Director of Photography

Joseph Vilsmaier

In colour

2nd Camera Operator

Emil Sirotek Snr

Editor

Hannes Nikel

Production Designers

Wolfgang

Hundhammer

Jindrich Goetz

Drugsman

Martin Maly

Special Effects

Karl Baumgartner

Daniel Braunschweig

Karl-Heinz Bochnig

Gerhard Neumeier

Uda Kötting

Helmut Hribernigg

Lasse Sorsa

Music/Music Director

Norbert J. Schneider

Music Performed by

Münchener

Philharmoniker

Electronic Music

Arrangements

Martin "Edit" Grassi

Music Co-ordinators

Rolf Moser

Bernd Strasser

Songs

"Heimat deine Sterne"

by Werner Bochmann,

Erich Knauf,

performed by Wilhelm

Streinz; "Roter Mohn"

by Michael Jary, Bruno

Batz, performed by

Rosita Serrano; "Der

Hohenfriedberger

Marsch" (traditional);

"Dunkel Nacht" by M.

Razdozkaya,

performed by Andrej

Kucharsky

Costume Design

Ute Hofinger

Make-up

Sylvia Leins

Alena Sedová

Paul Schmid

Zdenek Klíka

Czechoslovakia:

Frantisek Havlíček

Frantisek Pilny

Jiri Farkas

Title/Opticist

Bavaria Trick

Sound Editors

Friedrich M. Dosch

Thomas Knöpfel

ADR Editors

Evi Claudius

Ilo Endrulat

Sound Recordists

Gunther Stadelman

Music:

Malcolm Luker

Dolby stereo

Sound Re-recordists

G.G. Hoffmann

Lore Eberhard

Abi Schneider

Sound Effects

Uschi Busse

Jeannette Magerl

Foley Artists

Joo Furst

Andreas Schneider

Technical Advisor

Adalbert Weinzierl

Military Advisors

Hans-Erdmann

Schönbeck

Jochen Löser

Daniel Proektor

Hans Schwarzbraun

Richard Eiermann

Military Consultant

Enrico Squeri

Stunt Co-ordinators

Jaroslav Tomsa

Petr Drozda

Heinz Emigholt's Double

Ferdinand Schuster

Armourers

Bohumil Kadiec

Petr Prusa

Milan Kucera

Vladimir Janosek

Cast

Dominique Horwitz

Fritz Reiser

Thomas Kretschmann

Hans von Witzland

Jochen Nickel

Manfred "Rollo"

Rohleder

Sebastian Rudolph

Gege

Dane Vavrova

Irina

M

Sylvester Grath
Otto
Karel Normantek
Captain Musk
Heinz Emigholz
Edgar
Oliver Broumis
MGM
Dieter Ottens
Captain Haller
Zdenek Vencel
Wolk
Mark Kuhn
Pflüger
Thorsten Bolloff
Feldman
Eckhardt A. Wachholz
Minister Renner
J. Alfred Hohmert
Lupo
Ulrike Arnold
Viola
Christian Krüpfel
Dieter
Filip Cap
Ludwig
Jaroslav Tomso
Opa Erwin
Pavel Macek
Kolia
Oto Sevcik
Major Kock
Jophi Riss
Schröder
Svatopluk
German Soldier

Omar Dvorak
Von Lausitz
Karel Habel
Adjutant
Thomas Langs
Karel Hnalsicka
Doctors
Alexander Koller
Accordian Player
Petr Skarke
Hynek Cermak
Cestmir Randa
Soldiers
Jan Proucil
Major/Pilot
Bohumil Svarc
Doctor/Pilot
Pjro Leppanen
Crying Mother
Aale Mantila
Old Father
Theresa Vilsmaier
Jovina Vilsmaier
Dieter Standler
Jana Steindlerová
Kaja Normantek
Children

12,410 feet
138 minutes

Subtitles

Summer 1942. German troops recuperate in Italy after the North African campaign. Their wounded lieutenant is replaced by aristocratic Hans von Witzland, and as they are transported to the Eastern front to join the battle for Stalingrad, von Witzland and his NCO, Manfred "Rollo" Rohleder, bet over which of them will survive. In Stalingrad, Hans, Rollo and their men join in the bloody battle to capture a factory. Only 62 of their 400 men survive. Young Gege shoots one of their own men by mistake. A 13-year-old Russian, Kolia, is captured. They make a sortie down into the sewers, where a Russian woman, Irina, almost kills Hans, who is saved by another of his men, Fritz Reiser. A soldier is badly wounded. In an underground hospital they are arrested for trying to hasten his treatment.

December 1942. Hans and his men are in a penal battalion, sweeping mines in the snow with Russian POWs. They rehabilitate themselves in a bold mission to disable Russian tanks, but are then forced to act as an execution squad for 'saboteurs', including their earlier captive, Kolia. Hans attempts in vain to save the boy. By now the German army is in disorder. Hans, Fritz and Gege attempt to escape on one of the last flights out of the local airstrip. They do not get on the plane, and return past caravans of wounded and defeated men to Rollo and the others. The sadistic officer, Haller, shoots Gege and then, fearing for his life, promises them access to the officers' supplies. They kill him. They discover the cellar crammed with stores, and Irina, now a collaborator - the 'Germans' whore'. Hans saves her from Rollo's attentions and the group splits up again. Rollo joins the ranks of the surrendered, while Hans determines to escape with Irina. Now just Irina and two of the men are left. As they cross the steppe, she too is shot and the pitiless snows close in...

The cruel struggle for Stalingrad was one of the great turning points of the Second World War, and the Russian victory was celebrated in Vladimir Petrov's epic 1949 film *The Battle of Stalingrad*, a companion piece to Chiaureli's *The Fall of Berlin*, both of which included many scenes of Stalin and his generals calmly plotting the rout of the foe. But the Russians are largely absent from Joseph Vilsmaier's *Stalingrad*, as are the High Command, whether German or Russian. Here, the soldiers' enemies are their own callous and incompetent superior officers and the unforgiving Russian winter.

War in this *Stalingrad* is the journey of ordinary men to disillusionment and despair. Vilsmaier takes pains from the start to establish the different backgrounds, characters and attitudes of his soldiers, but by the end bitter wisdom has made them indistinguishable. Their experience of fighting is not of strategy and heroics - not, indeed, of grand encounters on the field of battle - but a maelstrom of confusion, fear and unknowing, the experience so tellingly captured by Stendhal in *The Charterhouse of Parma* and Tolstoy in *War and Peace*. All of this is pretty conventional stuff in the modern anti-heroic mode familiar from movies about the Vietnam war, though the unflinching rendering of the ingloriousness of the humiliation may have been particularly eloquent for German audiences (the film was released in Germany to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the defeat). The treatment of the peripheral Russians - girl partisan, boy captive and assorted grieving family groups - is also perfunctory and overlarded with coincidence. The main achievement of *Stalingrad* lies elsewhere.

Vilsmaier worked as a cinematographer for years before turning to direction, and he is his own cinematographer here. He has a marvellous eye, whether for dense, crowded interiors or for landscape. The sequences of von Witzland and his men holed up for days in the destroyed factory they are fighting to capture, and later in the fetid underground hospital display an attention to detail reminiscent of Wolfgang Petersen's *Das Boot*, and Vilsmaier is equally good at making a whole landscape come alive with masses of people going about their business. A famous Russian film about the war, Grigori Chukhrai's *The Ballad of a Soldier*, begins with its young hero disabling huge enemy tanks, and Vilsmaier offers a bravura hyperrealist version of this, shot from close up in the snow, sound and vision tensely magnified. Best of all, indeed, are the snowscapes, where his compositions in white and blue-black capture the legendary arduousness of the Russian winter in the tradition of nineteenth-century Russian painting. And the most effective of these is the inexorable, numbing white-out that freezes the life out of the last two survivors in the emptiness of the steppe as the film ends.

Julian Graffy

Striking Distance

USA 1993

Director: Rowdy Herrington

Certificate

18

Distributor

Columbia Tristar

Production Company

Columbia Pictures

Executive Producer

Steven Reuther

Producers

Arnon Milchan

Tony Thomopoulos

Hunt Lowry

Co-producer

Carmine Zozzora

Associate Producer

Martin Kaplan

Production Supervisors

Kathryn J. McDermott

2nd Unit:

Wm A. Johnson

Production Controller

Sondra Dee Boyachek

Unit Production Manager

Christopher Cronyn

Location Manager

Chuck Miller

2nd Unit Director

Todd Hollowell

Casting

Pam Dixon

Associate:

Naomi Yoelin

Assistant Directors

Nicholas C. Mastandrea

Dana J. Kuznetzkoff

Susan Pickett

2nd Unit:

Bruce Moriarty

Frank Falvey

Screenplay

Rowdy Herrington

Martin Kaplan

Director of Photography

Mac Ahlberg

Colour

Technicolor

2nd Unit Director of Photography

Thomas Priestley

Underwater Director of Photography

Al Giddings

Aerial Photography

David B. Nowell

Camera Operators

Lou Barlia

2nd Unit:

Gordon Hayman

Steadicam Operator

Greg Lundsgaard

Editors

Pasquale Buba

Mark Helfrich

2nd Unit:

Harry B. Miller III

Production Designer

Gregg Fonseca

Art Director

Bruce Miller

2nd Unit:

William Arnold

Set Design

Steve Arnold

Gina Granham

Set Decorator

Jay Hart

Storyboard Artist

Eric Ramsey

Special Effects

Allen L. Hall

Music

Brad Fiedel

Conductor

Shirley Walker

Music Editor

Allan K. Rosen

Songs

"Lil' Red Riding Hood"

by Ronald Blackwell,

performed by Sam the

Sham ■ The Pharaohs:

"Walk Right Now" by

Andy Shaw, Nick

Kenny, Simon Kenny,

Paul Disley, Charlie

Francis, performed by

2 Die 4; "Feel Like a

Number" by Bob Seger,

performed by Bob

Seger & The Silver

Bullet Band; "Spider's

Blues (Might Need It

Sometime)"; "Things

Happen" by Paul

Barrere, Fred Tackett,

Bill Payne, performed

by Little Feat

Costume Design

Betsy Cox

Wardrobe Supervisors

Linda Matthews

Brian Callahan

Diane Collins

Make-up

Jeanee Josefczyk

Scott H. Eddo

Hair Stylists

Jeffrey A. Rubis

Paul Abascal

Title Design

Pittard/Sullivan/

Fitzgerald

Opticals

Cinema Research

Corporation

Supervising Sound Editor

Steven Flick

Sound Editors

Mark Mangini

Dave Arnold

J.H. Arrufat

Sandy Berman

Supervising ADR Editor

Judee Flick

ADR Editors

R.J. Kizer

Andrew G. Patterson

Sound Recordists

John Sutton III

2nd Unit:

Steve Bores

Music:

Tim Boyle

Dolby stereo

Sound Re-recordists

Chris Carpenter

Chris David

Doug Hemphill

Technical Adviser

Robert J. McCaughan

Police Consultant

Watt Oggier

Stunt Co-ordinator

Mickey Gilbert

Stunt Doubles

Bruce Willis:

Keii Johnson

Jo Christman/Emily

Harper

Boat Co-ordinator

Pat Curtin

Boat Wranglers

C. Gordon Houser

Clark J. Maloof

Cast

Bruce Willis

Tom Hardy

Sarah Jessica Parker

W.C. Fields

Edward Gero

Officer Luffey

Dennis Farina

Andrew May

Nick Detillo

Tom Sizemore

Paula Puglisi

Brian James

Detective Eddie Eiler

Robert Pastorelli

Jimmy Detillo

Timothy Busfield

Tom Sacco

John Mahoney

Vince Hardy

Andre Braugher

Frank Morris

Tom Atkins

Fred Hardy

Mike Lodge

Don Penderman

Jodi Long

Kim Lee

Roscoe Orman

Detective Sid

McClelland

Robert Gould

Kesser

Garth Williams

Chick

Bill Hooks

Gunter

Lawrence Mandley

Bailiff

Juliana McCarthy

Judge

John T. Bower

Cop

Sally Wiggin

Andrea Martin

Suzanne Valada

Ken Rice

Newscasters

Michael Canavan

Gary Hardy

Scott Kloos

Jerry Hobart

Bruce Kirkpatrick

W.C. Fields

Edward Gero

Officer Luffey

Andrew May

Officer Schultz

Stigrid Adrienne

Paula Puglisi

Ebra Branson

Nurse Debbie

Jack Pashkin

Bartender

Erik Jonson

Drug Runner

Jeffrey J. Stephan

Dispatcher

Bob the Cat

Himself

9,148 feet

102 minutes

Pittsburgh, 1991. Tom Hardy, a fifth generation cop whose father Vince is chief of homicide, is due to give evidence against his ex-partner and cousin, Jimmy Detillo, for using excess violence on a suspect. The city is plagued by a serial killer who targets young women; when a call comes that the killer is being pursued, Tom and Vince give chase. In the subsequent crash Tom is injured, regaining consciousness to find Vince shot dead and the killer escaped. A lowlife, Kesser, is later charged with the killings. Jimmy Detillo, faced with disgrace and imprisonment, takes a death leap into the river from a high bridge. Two years later. For publicly asserting that Kesser is innocent and the killer is a cop, Tom, who has a reputation as an unreliable drunk, has been demoted to the River Rescue Patrol. His uncle Nick,



In the drink: Bruce Willis

Jimmy's father, is now chief of homicide. Jimmy's brother Danny, who quit the force after Jimmy's death, returns from California. A young woman's body is found in the river; Tom's insistence that the same killer is responsible meets with contempt from Nick and the homicide squad. Tom is assigned a new partner, Jo Christman. Initially wary, she comes to respect him after he tackles five gunmen who have hijacked a barge.

Another woman, a nurse, is abducted - like her predecessors, an ex-girlfriend of Tom's - and as before the killer phones him to let him hear her screams before killing her. Tom takes Jo to the police ball, where he's shunned by all except his Hardy relatives, and Danny shows up drunk and provokes a fight. Tom and Jo become lovers, but at his internal review she appears as Detective Emily Harper, assigned to keep tabs on him. Her evidence, though, is favourable and Tom escapes censure. Emily is abducted by the killer who, Tom realises, is hiding out in Detillo's Roost, a riverside cabin where he, Jimmy and Danny played as boys. He finds Danny there, but is knocked out and handcuffed to a chair by Jimmy, who survived his death dive and now prepares to kill Tom. Danny and Emily. He is forestalled by the arrival of Nick - who, it turns out, accidentally shot Vince while letting Jimmy escape. Jimmy now kills Nick and flees, but Tom struggles loose and pursues him, still handcuffed. After a long river chase Tom catches Jimmy and drowns him.

Early on in *Striking Distance* the father-and-son cop team of Vince and Tom Hardy embark on a Hollywood-special car chase, bucketing along the wrong side of a busy freeway. Amid all the frantic swerving, hooting and dodging of oncoming megatrucks, they swap lighthearted banter about Tom's taste in girlfriends. It's fair indication that nothing that follows need be taken too seriously, and that we shouldn't exercise our minds over loose ends, inconsistencies and wild implausibilities. Least of all, maybe, over just what the title - apart from fitting the two-word model currently de rigueur for action thrillers - has to do with anything in the film. The message is, relax and enjoy the ride.

And as rides go, it's not a bad one. For a start, the scenery's good. Rowdy Herrington is Pittsburgh born and bred, and he knows his terrain - especially the city's three rivers that provide a dramatic, offbeat backdrop to most of the action. The action itself comes in hefty bite-sized dollops - this is a Bruce Willis vehicle, after all - even throwing in a mini-*Die Hard* set-piece on a hijacked barge. There's a blatant red herring or two, a discreet helping of sex and even a hint of a subtext (loyalty vs honour), though not enough to alarm the popcorn belt. All in all, *Striking Distance* is prime fast-food cinema - unpretentious, digestible, and guaranteed not to linger in the mind.

Philip Kemp

Tom & Viv

United Kingdom 1994

Director: Brian Gilbert

Certificate

15

Distributor

Entertainment

Production Company

New Era
Entertainment
In association with
IRS Media
British Screen
The National Film
Development Fund

Executive Producers

Paul Colichman
Miles A. Copeland III

Producers

Marc Samuelson
Harvey Kass
Peter Samuelson

Line Producer

John Kay

Production Co-ordinator

Elizabeth Burn

Location Manager

Rachel Neale

Costing

UK:

Michelle Guish

USA:

Donald Paul Pemrick

Assistant Directors

Sean Guest

John Spencer

James Haven

Screenplay

Michael Hastings

Adrian Hodges

Based on the play

by Michael Hastings

Director of Photography

Martin Fuhrer

Scope

Colour

Technicolor

Camera Operators

David Worley

B:

Dave Bryant

Opticals

Cine Image Film

Opticals

Editor

Tony Lawson

Production Designer

Jamie Leonard

Art Director

Mark Raggett

Set Decorator

Jill Quartier

Special Effects Supervisor

Derek Langley

Music/Music Director

Debbie Wiseman

Music Extracts

"Beim Schlafengehn"

(from "The Four Last

Songs") by Richard

Strauss, performed

by The Vienna

Philharmonic

Orchestra; "Stabat

Mater" by Giovanni

Battista Pergolesi

Dance Hall Band Music

Performed by

The Palm Court

Theatre Orchestra

Music Consultant

Music Matters

Song

"They All Walk the

Wibbly Wobbly Walk"

by J.P. Long, Paul

Pelham

Choreography

Carol Fletcher

Costume Design

Phoebe De Gaye

Wardrobe Supervisors

Jo Korner

Annie Crawford

Chief Make-up Artist

Morag Ross

Hair Design

Jan Archibald

Title Design

Plume Partners

Sound Editors

Rodney Glenn

Dialogue:

Bill Trent

Sound Recordist

Peter Glossop

Dolby stereo

Sound Re-recorders

Ray Merrin

Graham Daniel

Cast

William Daloo

Tom Eliot

Miranda Richardson

Vivienne Haigh-Wood

Rosemary Harris

Rose Haigh-Wood

Tim Dalton

Maurice Haigh-Wood

Nicholas Grace

Bertrand Russell

Geoffrey Baydon

Harwent

Clare Holman

Louise Purdon

Philip Lecho

Charles Haigh-Wood

Joanna McCollum

Virginia Woolf

Joseph O'Connor

Bishop of Oxford

John Savident

Sir Frederick Lamb

Michael Atwell

W.L. Jones

Sharon Bower

Secretary

Linda Spurrer

Edith Sitwell

Roberts Taylor

Ottoline Morrell

Christopher Balnes

Vergor

Anna Chancellor

Woman

John Clegg

Simon Robson

Men

James Greene

Dr Cyriax

Leo Hirsch

Captain Todd

Edward Holman

Telegraph Boy

Simon McDermott

Dr Reginald Miller

William Osborne

Curate

Hugh Simon

Concierge

Derek Sims

Mr Davis

Peter Stockbridge

Porter

Julith Sweeney

Nurse

Giles Taylor

Young Man

11,254 feet

125 minutes

Summer 1914. Vivienne Haigh-Wood, daughter of an English propertied family, visits T. S. (Tom) Eliot, a young American postgraduate fellow at Merton College, Oxford, and modernist poet; she is accompanied by her younger brother Maurice, a junior army officer. Tom and Viv instantly fall in love. Knowing that Viv suffers from mood swings and almost constant menstrual bleeding caused by hormonal problems, Maurice is disturbed to learn that the pair plan to marry rapidly without permission from Viv's parents, but merely warns him always to be kind to Viv. The drugs prescribed by Viv's physician offer no relief but cause (undiagnosed) side-effects for which further drugs are prescribed. Desperate for relief, Viv frequently binges on a mixture of medication, despite warnings from her pharmacist Louise.

On her wedding night, Viv bleeds heavily. Next morning, Tom walks alone on the beach, while she takes a cocktail of medicines and trashes the hotel room. Viv's father Charles is initially hostile to Tom, but her mother Rose approves of him. Tom and Viv live frugally in London, and she supports his writing critically, secretarily and emotionally. Ill from overwork, he often finds her unconscious from a drug overdose. They have moments of happiness, and in public, Tom pays tribute to their love. But as his fame and status among the Bloomsbury set increase, Viv becomes more confrontational. She is furious when he 'compromises' his poetry by taking a job in a City bank, and is increasingly excluded as he turns towards Anglo-Catholicism.

In 1922 Tom publishes *The Waste Land*. At a dinner party, Virginia Woolf suggests in Viv's presence that Tom would benefit from his wife's removal. Viv's father dies, and she learns that her mother has helped Maurice and Eliot make themselves sole trustees of his estate. In 1925 Tom becomes a director of the publisher Faber & Gwyer (later Faber & Faber) and, encouraged by his entourage, increasingly makes himself inaccessible to Viv. A medical specialist tells Tom and Rose she has a disorder called 'moral insanity'. Maurice and Tom claim to Rose that Viv is now a serious threat to Tom's career, and propose to have her committed. In 1937, Rose and Maurice bring in doctors to 'test' Viv's sanity, and she is committed, losing her financial and voting rights. Louise vows to fight for a change in the law.

After nearly a decade in a private asylum, the menopause has brought an end to Viv's symptoms. Charles Todd, a US research fellow, visits her with news of a treatment breakthrough for her former condition, and questions the legality of Tom's control of her estate; she declares she still loves him. Tom has not contacted Viv for ten years, yet tells his friend and former tutor Bertrand Russell that she is still "with him every minute of the day". After several years in Africa, Maurice visits Viv, who tells him she is as sane as he is, and hands him a chocolate cake to give

to Tom. A caption tells us she died in the asylum on 22 June 1947.

"How often is Granny visiting you?" the quintessentially proper Rose Haigh-Wood suddenly asks Viv, after removing her daughter from the dining room when Viv's insistence on discussing pacifism threatens the peace of the 1914 English family dinner. "I thought Granny was dead," retorts Viv, before replying that she is menstruating three times a week. The presence of such startling moments - at once shrouded in euphemism and uncomfortably explicit - marks *Tom & Viv* as a welcome departure from the pretence of some recent revisionist costume dramas (Coppola's *Dracula* and Poliakov's *Century* spring to mind) that taboos and mores were the same 'then' as they are now. While it inevitably allots us the pleasures of superior knowledge, director Brian Gilbert makes a real effort to position us to understand the specific fears and ignorances of another time.

Tom & Viv creates a significant genre disturbance by its insertion of gynaecology - the female body as messy, uncontrollable organism - into a past which a spate of recent films have unerringly imagined as a place of controlled emotions and sexual restraint. All the more disappointing, then, that this disturbance is diluted by heritage aspirations of the duller kind. While the film's sharp scripting is directly traceable to co-screenwriter Michael Hastings' subtle, impressionistic play of the same name, the aesthetic imposed by Gilbert is a slick, self-conscious exercise in period-by-numbers. Gleaming vintage cars, wildflower-rich cornfields, Oxford architecture, gawping undergraduates and punts clog the screen in the first few minutes alone. The mismatch between these nostalgic signifiers and the modernism of *Tom & Viv*'s protagonists betrays not only a deeply impoverished conception of the genre but something calculated in the whole project. Inoffensively beautiful and flawlessly acted, *Tom & Viv* often feels more like a PR event than a movie which might spontaneously move or amuse.

At the same time, *Tom & Viv* is all the more problematic to criticise, in view of its status as part of a real-life ▶



Flowers for remembrance: Richardson

noirs. Enjoying themselves with a summary of the noir era, Bailey and Daviau provide good reason for a fresh look at Joseph L. Lewis's *The Big Combo* (1955) – although it was a latecomer by comparison with *Out of the Past* or *T-Men* (both 1947) – to savour the ruthless lighting economies of the remarkable John Alton.

On dubious territory, Daviau describes *Touch of Evil* (1958), the ultimate in noir, as a New Wave film made in a Hollywood studio – a confusing reshuffle of influences which turns out to be part of a general nostalgia for the attractions of black-and-white photography. Confronted by Laughton's irresistibly noir-esque *Night of the Hunter*, miraculously shot by Stanley Cortez in 1955, and Mackendrick's *Sweet Smell of Success* (1957), accompanied by deferential remarks from James Wong Howe, we can forgive his enthusiasm.

When colour is at last allowed its proper contribution, *Visions of Light* becomes a different and, as it happens, a more enjoyable enterprise, with various DPs (preferred abbreviation these days for Directors of Photography) chatting in a cosily Masonic way about their own accomplishments and those of their admired colleagues. Conrad Hall (*Cool Hand Luke*, *Fat City*) emerges rather well from these exchanges, with an intriguing description of an accident of lighting used for *In Cold Blood*. So, too, does an unexpected Roman Polanski, credited by both William Fraker (*Rosemary's Baby*) and John Alonzo (*Chinatown*) with an acute visual sense. Haskell Wexler tells how he was nearly fired from *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, Gordon Willis says he went too far in *The Godfather Part II* ("I think even Rembrandt went too far sometimes"), Nestor Almendros describes the 20-minute 'magic hour' and its effect on *Days of Heaven*, and Vittorio Storaro pontificates – a touch obscurely – about the colour vocabulary of *The Last Emperor*.

Concluding with the most recent titles available, which date it instantly, *Visions of Light* illustrates Ballhaus on Scorsese with a sequence from *GoodFellas* (avoiding obvious reference to *Vertigo*), Elmes on Lynch with *Blue Velvet*, Dickerson on Lee with *Do the Right Thing*. On an appropriately positive note, John Bailey sums up that cinematography is at a jumping-off point into an unknown but very exciting future, a reasonable expectation in the context of virtual reality, high-definition television, and the ultimate Grail of holographic drama.

What the film really achieves, scrapbook fashion, is a reminder of too much ignored, set aside, forgotten, overdue for fresh affection. While setting an example for similar forays into such cinematic skills as editing, design, and the use of sound, *Visions of Light* will probably be best remembered, all the same, for revealing that *Jaws* was shot (by Bill Butler) with a pre-Steadicam hand-held camera. Nausea, it seems, would otherwise have driven Spielberg's audiences from their seats.

Philip Strick

What's Eating Gilbert Grape

USA 1993

Director: Lasse Hallström

Certificate
12

Distributor
Entertainment
Production Company
Paramount

Executive Producer
Lasse Hallström
Alan C. Blomquist

Producers
David Matalon
Meir Teper
Bertil Ohlsson

Production Co-ordinator
Kelley Wood

Unit Production Manager
Richard J. Gelfand
Location Manager
Charles Harrington

Post-production Supervisor
Richard J. Gelfand

Costing
Gail Levin

Texas:
Jo Edna Boldin

Voice:
David Kramer's Looping
Group

Assistant Directors
David Householter

Linda Brachman
Seth Cirkler

Screenplay
Peter Hedges

Based on his novel
Director of Photography
Sven Nykvist

Colour
Technicolor

Prints by DeLuxe

Camera Operators
Kevin Jewison

Anastas Michos
Chris Hayes

Editor
Andrew Mondshein

Production Designer
Bernt Capra

Art Director
John Myhre

Art Department
Co-ordinator
Kathy Budas

Set Decorator
Gretchen Rau

Set Dressers
Kim Larson

Sean Patrick Brennan
Elizabeth McNamara

Ross Dreyer
Bongo Don Stroud

Draughtswoman
Maya S. Macesich

Lead Scenic
Ronald Ashmore

Scenic Artist
Theresa Dringenberg

Special Effects Co-ordinator
Howard Jensen

Special Effects
Scott Prescott

Paul Stewart

Music
Alan Parker

Björn Isfält

Piano Performed by
David Hartley

Music Production
Supervisor
Graham Walker

Music Editor
Joseph S. DeBeasi

Music Associate
Chris Cozens

Songs
"This Magic Moment" by

Doc Pomus, Mort
Shuman, performed by

The Manor High School
Marching Band; "Sorry

Wrong Number"
by Franz Waxman;

"Indiscretion of an
American Wife" by

Alessandro Cicognini;
"Harmony Lane" by

Arthur Kay; "Foodland
Muzak"; "Waterfalls"

by and performed by

Joseph S. DeBeasi

Costume Design
Renée Ehrlich Kalfus

Costume Supervisor
Kathleen Kiatta

Make-up Artist
Patty York

Prosthetics Make-up
Rodd Matsui

Hair stylist
Deborah Ann Piper

Title Design
Nina Saxon Film Design

Titles/Opticals
Pacific Title

Supervising Sound Editor
Michael Kirchner

Dialogues Editors
Bitty O'Sullivan-Smith

Dan Korintus
Neil Kaufman

Supervising ADR Editor
Jane McCulley

ADR Editors
Deborah Wallach

Stuart Stanley

Foley Editor
Louis Bertini

Sound Recordist
David Brownlow

Music: Chris Dibble

Foley Recordist
Dom Tavella

Dolby stereo Consultant:
Brad Hohle

Sound Re-recordist
Lee Dichter

Sound Effects Editor
Paul P. Soncek

Foley Artists
Elisha Birnbaum

Brian Vancho

Stunt Co-ordinator
Rusty McClennon

Cast
Johnny Depp

Gilbert Grape
Juliette Lewis

Becky
Mary Steenburgen

Betty Carver
Leonardo DiCaprio

Arnie Grape
John C. Reilly

Tucker Van Dyke
Darlene Cates

Bonnie Grape
Laura Harrington

Amy Grape
Mary Kate Schellhardt

Ellen Grape
Crispin Glover

Bobby McBurney
Kevin Tighe

Mr Carver
Penelope Branning

Becky's Grandmother
Tim Green

Mr Lamson
Susan Loughran

Mrs Lamson
Robert B. Hodges

Minister
Mark Jordan

Todd Carver
Cameron Finley

Doug Carver
Brady Coleman

Sheriff Farrell
Tim Smeck

Deputy
Nicholas Stojanovich

Daniel Gullaborn
Boys

Libby Villarri
Waitress

Kay Bower
Police Secretary

Joe Stevens
Burger Barn Manager

Mona Lee Fultz
Bakery Worker

George Haynes
Dave

10,578 feet
118 minutes

Endora, Iowa. Gilbert Grape lives with his mother Bonnie, two sisters and mentally retarded brother Arnie in the run-down house built by his father. His mother, who weighs 36 stone, has not left the house since her husband hanged himself in the cellar. Gilbert works in the local grocery store, whose clientele has mostly deserted to the supermarket on the outskirts of town. Gilbert has been having an affair for almost a year with Betty Carver, the wife of Endora's insurance broker. During one of Gilbert's many deliveries to the Carver household, Arnie, who has been left in the truck, climbs the gas tower in the centre of town. Gilbert coaxes him down, and meets Becky, who is travelling in a camper with her grandmother, among the onlookers. Gilbert's routine is disrupted by Becky's arrival. He fails to complete his brother's evening bathing ritual, and returns in the early hours of the morning to find a shivering Arnie waiting for him in a stone cold tub. Gilbert also becomes less keen on his clandestine relationship with Betty Carver. After her husband is suddenly and inexplicably drowned in their children's paddling pool, Betty tells Gilbert she is leaving town to start afresh. Meanwhile, Arnie climbs to the top of the gas tower again, and this time the police take him into custody. Observed by the curious local population, Gilbert's mother stirs and goes to the police station to fetch back her son.

Becky and her grandmother are due to leave the following day after the grand opening of the new Burger Barn and Arnie's eighteenth birthday. On the eve of the party Arnie, still traumatised by the cold bath experience, lashes out as Gilbert tries to wash him, provoking his brother into hitting him. Gilbert sets out to leave town but changes his mind. Arnie visits Becky, who persuades him to conquer his fear

of water by jumping into the stream near her camper. Gilbert then spends the night with Becky. The next day is Arnie's birthday, and although Bonnie wants to remain out of sight, Gilbert persuades her to meet Becky before she leaves in the camper. At home, Bonnie decides she wants to go upstairs to her bedroom, where she has not ventured for years. She dies in her sleep, and is found by Arnie the next day. Rather than have her specially removed by a crane, the children cremate Bonnie and the house. A year later, Gilbert and Arnie wait by the roadside for Becky.

The subtitle for *What's Eating Gilbert Grape* could be 'Insignificance', Endora being the sort of town that jumped off life's carousel long before the Big Dipper came along and made everything hazardous. The latent oddity of middle-American ordinariness is well-trodden ground, but here the point is not that Iowa has secret priest-holes of bizarre activity waiting to be prised open, but that it truly is monotonously normal. In *What's Eating Gilbert Grape* things often seem strange the way they do in Jane Campion's short *Passionless Moments*: no one does much that is weird, it's just framed or edited to look that way. The appeal of successful bizarre normality – a sort of fictional version of life in fly-on-the-wall documentaries – is that it is not given any hidden meaning, but remains inconsequential.

Difficult to pin down, the attraction of this in Lasse Hallström's film is a matter of style. There are wry moments of incongruous juxtaposition, such as Ken Carver's bovine head trampolining up from behind the garden hedge as Gilbert and Betty are getting down to a bit of illicit Häagen Dazs-inspired passion, or Endora's new mobile Burger Barn arriving just as Ken's coffin is being laid to rest. Here, what's humorous is the sequence of ▶



Grapes against the grain: Leonardo DiCaprio, Johnny Depp

◀ events, not simply the events themselves. *What's Eating Gilbert Grape* is evocative in the way it draws – and draws on – minutiae, so the overall picture is the sum of accumulated detail. Bonnie Grape's way of clutching her tub of popcorn with simultaneous resentment and possessiveness conveys more about her self-loathing and her defiance than any trite verbal exchange about why she slumped into obesity.

Like Hallström's earlier *My Life As a Dog*, this is a film of sentiment that eschews sentimentality, despite the main storylines concerning Gilbert and his family and Gilbert and his relationship with the outsider Becky. There are moments ripe for cloying treatment, like Gilbert's intense meaning-of-life conversations with Becky, first amid the haystacks at sunset, everything bathed in rich golden haloes, and second beside a campfire at night. If only Gilbert could fathom her cryptic, whimsical statements and questions. There's an awareness of the dangers of being mawkish that ensures any mindless rhapsody is side-stepped, interrupted, deflated; a pragmatic approach to tearjerk material best summed up by the carefully unpatronising treatment of Arnie.

If there is any underpinning theme in *What's Eating Gilbert Grape*, it's a notion of space. From the opening sequence, when the convoy of glistening silver campers bringing Becky into town snakes over the lazy hillside towards Gilbert and Arnie, there's a sharp distinction made between the parochial day-to-day aimlessness of Endora, and the potential of life elsewhere. When Gilbert drives out of town only to turn back as soon as he's passed its farewell sign, he goes in search of Becky and tells her, "I've got nowhere to go". Beyond Endora there's a vast expanse and there's nothing – Gilbert gazes out at that open space, while Arnie waves at it each time he scales the heights of the gas tower. The reality of Endora, though, is something more akin to the world created by Bonnie, the lapsed matriarch of the Grape household, who has defined her space as being almost exclusively the inside of her house, shrouding herself in its confined bleakness. Whenever the despairing Gilbert tries to break away, something – such as Arnie running away – happens to pull him back.

What's Eating Gilbert Grape is a beautiful, luxurious film that wears any solemn intention lightly. Its insignificance is finely drawn, creating a kaleidoscope of images and moments that, apropos of nothing much, are all-consuming. From Gilbert's undertaker's assistant friend using a bent spoon and an ashtray to back up his 'magic heart attack' theory of how Ken Carver could have drowned in a paddling pool four inches deep, to Bonnie's blancmange shape silhouetted against her drawn bedroom curtains as she tells Gilbert he's her knight in shining armour, it is the detail that explains the whole.

Stella Bruzzi

White Angel

United Kingdom 1993

Director: Chris Jones

Certificate

15

Distributor

Pilgrim Entertainment

Production Company

Living Spirit Pictures

Producer

Genevieve Jolliffe

Production Co-ordinator

Carmen Dyer

Production Manager

Charles Aspinwall

Assistant Directors

Stefanie Kleinhenz

Ray Oberholze

Screenplay

Chris Jones

Genevieve Jolliffe

Director of Photography

Jon Walker

In colour

Camera Operator

Jane Rousseau

Optical Special Effects

Howell Opticals

Editor

John Holland

Production Designer

Mark Sutherland

Art Director

Kay Minter

Special Effects

Philip Mathews

Music

Harry Gregson-Williams

Costume Design

Sheena Gunn

Make-up

Karen Fundell

Amanda Warburton

Kimberley Harlow

Title Design

Alternative Designs

Cine Image

Sound Editor

Wyndham Vincent

Sound Recordists

Paul Lord

2nd Unit:

Adrian Tomlin

Matthew Harmer

Sound Re-recordist

Tim Cavagin

Foley Artist

Dianne Greaves

Cast

Harriet Robinson

Ellen Carter

Peter Firth

Leslie Steckler

Don Henderson

Inspector Taylor

Anne Catherine Arvan

Mik

Harry Miller

Alan Smith

Joe Collins

Graham

Caroline Stanton

Steckler's Wife

Mark Stevens

Carter's Husband

Inez Thorn

Dezerae

Suzanne Sinclair

Forensics Expert

Jade Hensbury

Alan Smith's Daughter

Chris Sullivan

Bank Manager

Ken Sharrock

Bank Teller

Samantha Norman

Char Show Host

Carol Darwood

TV News

Anchorwoman

John Bennett

TV News Reporter

Isabel Harry

Secretary

Captain H. Sutherland

Inspector Forrester

Gill Ashton

Mary

Maroula Nicolaeu

Dental Assistant

Debbie Cowan

Hunting Victim

Gerakline Williams

Prostitute

Mark Allen

Murder Witness

Miko Oke

Game Show Host

Katie Groove

Catherine Mary Martin

Emma Snow

Hunting Montage

Anita Hoy

Photo Model

Genevieve Herbert

Alan Smith's Wife

Carl Stevens

Kevin

Mary McGovern

Sharon

Amanda Stevens

Body in Park

8,670 feet

96 minutes

● London, the present. Ellen Carter, a true crime writer fallen on hard times, takes on mild-mannered dentist Leslie Steckler as a second lodger. But Leslie is also the White Angel, a serial killer mistakenly assumed to be female, who preys on women dressed in white. At work Ellen is visited by Inspector Taylor who is still suspicious about her husband's abrupt disappearance three years previously. Meanwhile, Leslie searches through Ellen's house until he finds a false wall concealing the quasi-mummified form of her husband. Hiding the body elsewhere as blackmail material, Leslie confronts Ellen and explains his plan: if she writes his story, then he won't tell hers. Ellen agrees on condition that he stop killing, and for good measure gives



Out for the death count: Harriet Robinson

immediate notice to her other (female) lodger Mik, for fear of Leslie's attentions towards her.

While the police's investigations plod on, their only tangible evidence a fingerprint on a hammer, Ellen's research on Leslie proceeds apace. She explains that her husband was a sadist, and in turn Leslie shows a home video of a picnic with his wife in which, reacting to her incessant scolding, he stabs her to death. He begins to feel increasingly affectionate towards Ellen, believing her a kindred spirit.

Ellen finds some bloody cycling shorts that she recognises as Mik's and rushes round to her flat to find signs of a violent struggle. At home, she sees Leslie burying a body in the garden. The next day, she makes an imprint of his safety deposit key, retrieves and destroys the incriminating evidence against her, and then shoots and bludgeons him to death, bricking him up behind the false wall. Mik comes round to thank Leslie, who had been at her flat for dinner the previous night, when she had had an accident with an electric carving knife – Leslie's quick action had saved her life. Inspector Taylor arrives. The fingerprint on the hammer turned out to be Ellen's. Leslie is found bricked up in the wall. A freshly buried body is in the garden. Ellen, it appears, must be the White Angel.

● Aliens, Terminators and Predators may achieve remarkable death counts and be hideous to the eye, but you can't judge them by our moral standards. They are a warrior race – they are not us. One step closer but still monstrously outside, the supernatural rebirths of slasher-pic ghouls such as Freddie, Jason and Michael move them from the social to the satanic realm. Then come the serial killers, unremitting, socially located and human – the blameworthy terror within the home. They are fallible, and ill-reasoning rather than un-reasoning; their quality of being 'like us' casts them as wrong and accountable. Further, they mirror their prey in being victims – Norman Bates and John McNaughton's Henry, of their mothers, *Peeping Tom's* Mark of his father. They

have suffered, so now they make suffering, runs the rationale; and as with the werewolf on his deathbed, the silver bullet of psychiatry makes everything causally, explicable, all right.

White Angel corresponds snugly to this model, but as if it were really itching to be part of the same club, tailored to fit in. It is less a film about a serial killer than a serial killer film. From its title (an elision of *White of the Eye* with *Angel of Vengeance*?) to its lead killer (a cultured, soft-spoken medical professional), it is a patchwork of films and techniques past. But rather than it being self-consciously allusive or parodic, director Chris Jones simply opts for the overtly derivative.

The question of just how Ellen and Leslie are dissimilar in their commonly-held experience of killing – the question around which the film is scripted with some deliberation – is tentatively posed, then ditched. Instead of exploring this theme, Jones gives us stalking cameras, crane shots, big close-ups of TV-screen pixels, and bleached-out point-of-view – shots through the killer's eyes – a succession of inappropriate techniques running after another story.

Leslie's eventual capture or punishment is inevitable (he says so himself, and we catch glimpses of police operations throughout), as is Ellen's role as his nemesis. So the route towards his come-uppance, whether it's climaxed by a shoot-out in the dark (an apparent tribute to *The Silence of the Lambs*) or undermined by a police misunderstanding, is neither surprising nor dramatic. It's like an episode of *Tales of the Unexpected*.

With the direction so radically constrained by suspense-film convention, the plot jettisons any attempt to answer its own questions (what makes someone repeatedly kill? is there such a thing as justifiable murder?), twisting and turning in the absence of analysis or explanations. Instead, cod psychologising tries to pass muster as sufficient insight, and Leslie's motivation – a bossy wife who dressed in white – becomes the rickety, risible linchpin on which it all tries to hang.

Paul Tarrago

Widows Peak

United Kingdom 1993

Director: John Irvin

Certificate

PG
Distributor
 Rank
Production Company
 Jo Manuel Productions
Executive Producer
 Michael White
Co-executive Producers
 Steven D. Mackler
 Julian Schlossberg
Producer
 Jo Manuel
Co-producers
 Tracey Seaward
 Prudence Farrow
Production Co-ordinator
 Fiona Traynor
Production Manager
 Gemma Fallon
Location Manager
 Don Geraghty
Casting
 Nuala Moiseille
Assistant Directors
 Marinn O'Malley
 Michael Walsh
 Robert Quinn
Screenplay/Story
 Hugh Leonard
Director of Photography
 Ashley Rowe
Colour
 Eastman Color
2nd Unit Camera
 Des Whelan
 Shane O'Neill
Editor
 Peter Tanner
Production Designer
 Leo Austin
Art Directors
 David Wilson
 Richard Elton
Art Department
Co-ordinator
 Christine Austin
Special Effects
 Gerry Johnston
Music/Music Director
 Carl Davis
Harmonica performed by
 Harry Pitch
Orchestrations
 Nic Raine
Music Editor
 Andrew Glen
Songs
 "I'll Be Your Sweetheart" by H. Dacre; "My Sweetheart of Sigma Chi" by F. Vernor, B. Stokes, performed by Chris Branwell; "Mother Machree" by Rida Young, performed by Donal Byrne
Costume Design
 Consolata Boyle
Chief Make-up Artists
 Lois Burwell
 Morna Ferguson
Chief Hairstylists
 Stevie Hall
 Dee Corcoran
Titles/Opticals
 General Screen Enterprises
Sound Editors
 Les Wiggins
 Dialogue:
 Archie Ludski
Foley Editor
 Rocky Phelan

Sound Recordists

Peter Lindsay
 John Hayward
Music:
 Mike Ross Turner
 Dolby stereo
Foley Artists
 Jean Sheffield
 Jenny Lee Wright
Stunt Co-ordinator
 Marc Boyle

Film Extract

The Ten Commandments (1956)

Cast

Mia Farrow
 Miss O'Hare
 Joan Plowright
 Mrs DC (Doyle Counihan)
 Natasha Richardson
 Edwina Broom
 Adrian Dunbar
 Godfrey
 Jim Broadbent
 Clancy
 Anne Kent
 Miss Grubb
 John Kavanagh
 Canon
 Synagh O'Grady
 Maddie
 Gerard McSorley
 Gaffney
 Michael James Ford
 Rokesby
 Garrett Keogh
 Grogan
 Britta Smith
 Mrs Colgan
 Sheila Filton
 Mrs Mulrooney
 Marie Connee
 Mrs Lawless
 Ingrid Craigie
 Mrs Purdieu
 Doroon Keogh
 Mrs Buckley
 Eileen Colgan
 Mrs Fogarty
 Oliver Maguire
 Kilkelly
 Phelim Drew
 FX
 Jasmine Russell
 Bridgie
 Tina Kellegher
 Dolores
 David Gandy
 Liam
 Mick Grennell
 Compere
 Don Wycherley
 Rural Lout
 Malcolm Douglas
 Townie
 Clive Geraghty
 Garda Super
 Pamela Cadell
 Sister Teresa
 Rachel Dowling
 Tall Thin Girl
 Aisling Filton
 Mary Lucy
 Marie McDermot
 Penitent
 Donal Byrne
 Singer
 Kevin O'Farrell
 O'Farrell
 Michael Casey
 Pianist

9,107 feet
 101 minutes

Ireland, the 20s. Kilshannon is a small town inhabited largely by widows and led by Mrs Doyle Counihan (known as Mrs DC). Her son Godfrey is being treated by the local dentist Clancy, who professes to be in love with Catherine O'Hare, a poor spinster.

Mrs DC takes Catherine for a ride and tells her to be careful about marrying. They visit the local solicitor where they learn that an Englishwoman will be taking up residence in the town; Catherine has a violent outburst against the English. Edwina Broom, the new arrival, who is in fact American, drives into town but is forced to stop just outside by a puncture. Godfrey meets her and warns her about his mother's insatiable need to control. Edwina has tea with Mrs DC and the widows. Catherine is venomously unfriendly. Edwina tells them about her marriage to an deceased English soldier in the south of France. Mrs DC is keen for Godfrey to court her.

Edwina, who purposely seems to have recruited the town snoop as her maid, receives Godfrey's attentions. They go to a local dance, where Edwina and Catherine cause a fight over which of them is a prize winner. War breaks out between the two women. At the local regatta, where Edwina accepts Godfrey's marriage proposal and sinks Catherine's boat, a drunken English soldier turns up and professes to know Edwina. Catherine marches him home to find out more.

That night, Edwina finds her maid going through her letters and locks her in a room until she tells her the truth about Catherine. Shortly after, Edwina and Godfrey's engagement is announced. Catherine meets Clancy, who makes her admit to having an illegitimate child, then leaves her. Catherine bursts in on the DCs at lunch. She tells her story - that she had an illegitimate child by an English soldier and that the women of the town took her baby away and in return let her live free in the part of town known as Widows Peak. She says that she traced the baby and found out that it had died; she then denounces Edwina as a fortune-hunting prostitute. Edwina walks out.

The next day, Edwina is seen getting onto Catherine's boat. The morning after, she is rescued from the boat but there is no sign of Catherine. Mrs DC leads a campaign branding her as a murderess. Catherine turns up, claiming that she went ashore to see her sister. She says she will be going to live with her. Mrs DC is visited by her solicitor, now representing Edwina, who is suing her for defamation. She collapses in horror. That night, Godfrey tries to run away in a boat, but the boat is leaking and sinks.

On a luxurious liner, Edwina, the drunken soldier, Catherine and Clancy discuss the whole affair. It transpires that Edwina is Catherine's daughter, and that the plot was cooked up by them to take revenge.

Carl Davis' opening score swirls over an undulating Irish view, suggesting that *Widows Peak* will be a melancholy mood piece. But that's probably just the first of the several of the film's so-called jokes. Here's another: Joan Plowright, Mia Farrow and Jim Broadbent rolling out their best Irish accents, and Natasha

Richardson going American again. As it happens, most of them pull it off. It is only Plowright, in scenery-chewing, vowel-rolling, pantomime dame style, who is prone to forget the necessary intonations.

Although this is a film of mainly broad comic strokes, it does reveal a certain delicacy of touch in John Irvin, the director who brought us *Hamburger Hill*. The wooing of Farrow's spinsterish Catherine by Broadbent's bluff dentist Clancy is shown in one tea-time scene, in which, aping her every move, Clancy ends up making a shy, smiling fool of himself. Many of the broad strokes work well enough too: Richardson's vampish Edwina - a mix of strong-willed *femme fatale* and outsider aiming to please - is interesting enough to keep us wondering what she is really up to. Farrow, who looks as if she has stepped out of *The Purple Rose of Cairo* complete with subdued print dresses and quiet persona, suddenly turns out to have a lacerating tongue and an extraordinary amount of obstinacy. Even Adrian Dunbar's Godfrey remains engaging - the 'mammy's boy' endlessly trying to convince Edwina of his manliness, while being treated by his mother like a small child.

Less fortunately, the film cannot resist the occasional compulsion to do what it obviously considers the really Irish thing, and go into frenetic, farcical overdrive. Hence its ludicrously snoopish maid - who, if she really were that bad at being nosy, would not get away with anything; a puerile priest flanked by fatuously ingenuous nuns; and whooping, dancing rustics. At least the inevitable dancing scene has a point - it sets up the apparent rift between Catherine and Edwina.

Like better comedy, *Widows Peak* has a darker side to its humour. Its observations may be simplified, but they point to a closed, suspicious community that Plowright's Mrs Doyle Counihan rules from her house on top of the hill, literally watching over her neighbours (or rather subjects) through her telescope. She has the power to take a woman's illegitimate daughter away from her, and to keep her adult son as an emaciated child.

It may be for those reasons that as the film moves from comedy to drama, and a more sinister side of the charming little village emerges, we are still prepared to be more or less convinced by it. But all that disappears with the final joke. Such a ludicrous denouement not only makes little logical sense but also undermines every scrap of sympathy or understanding the characters and their situations may have managed to evoke.

Writer Hugh Leonard is better known for his heartfelt dramas such as *Da*, and his literary TV adaptations, than for his comedy. Here it seems as if, unsure that the comedy will stand up on its own, he is covering his back with a top layer of shock tactics. But if the film-makers don't have enough confidence in the film, why should an audience bother?

Amanda Lipman

TV FILMS

All Things Bright and Beautiful

United Kingdom/Ireland 1994

Director: Barry Devlin

Distributor

BBC TV
Production Companies
 Hilltown Ltd
 For The Good Film Company
 For BBC Northern Ireland
 For Screen Two
 In association with The Irish Film Board/RTE

Executive Producers

Robert Cooper
 Paul McGuinness
 Mark Shivas

Producer

Katy McGuinness

Line Producer

Donna Grey

Associate Producer

Michael Garland

Production Co-ordinator

Yvonne McDonald

Location Manager

Des Martin

Post-production Supervisor

Winston McCartney

Casting

John Hubbard
 Ros Hubbard

Assistant Directors

Ian Madden
 Cliff Lanning
 Tracy O'Connor

Screenplay

Barry Devlin

Director of Photography

Declan Quinn

Colour

Eastman Color

Editor

Maurice Healy

Production Designer

Grant Hicks

Supervising Art Director

Eddy Andres

Art Director

Karen Wakefield

Set Decorator

Josie MacAvin

Music Co-ordinator

Jim Lockhart

Songs

"The Ugly Duckling" by Frank Loesser, performed by Danny Kaye; "Bring Flowers of the Fairest"; "The Laughing Policeman"; by Bill Grey, performed by Charles Penrose; "All Things Bright and Beautiful"; "There's a Friend for Little Children" performed by Uncle Mac; Barbara Mullen, Dennis Wright; "Typewriter" by and performed by Leroy Anderson; "Nellie The Elephant" by Peter Hart, Ralph Butler, performed by Mandy Miller; "Christopher Robin at Buckingham Palace"; by A.A. Milne, Ralph Butler, performed by Anne Stephens

Costume Design

Lindy Hemming

Make-up/Hair

Christine Blundell

Title Design

William Finnie

Digital Sound Editor

Chris Craver

Sound Recordist

Godfrey Kirby
 Dolby stereo
Dubbing Mixer
 Keith Marriner
Foley Artists
 Dianne Greaves
 Jack Stew
Armourer
 John McKenna

Cast

Tom Wilkinson
 Father McAteer

Kevin McNally
 Tommy O'Neill

Gabrielle Raby
 Maeve O'Neill

Lorraine Pilkington
 Eileen O'Neill

Claran Fitzgerald
 Barry O'Neill

Gabriel Byrne
 The Good Thief

Conall Tolan
 Francis

John-Joe Hartigan
 Charlie

Kevin McElroy
 Phelim

Cooleanna McEhail
 Sarah O'Neill

Barbara Adair
 Miss McKeown

Mario Jones
 Ellie Coyle

Christine McDonaghe
 Rosie

Mario Ward
 Greta

Doorbhalla O'Reilly
 Bridgie

Frances Quinn
 Miss Rocks

Robert Taylor
 "B" Special Sergeant

Rodri Conaghan
 "B" Special

Jimmy Neagh
 Tarry Coyle

Laur Ruddy
 Pat Joe Coyle

Gabriel Brady
 First Man in Pub

Seamus Balf
 Labourer

Brendan Coakwell
 Fisherman

Karl O'Neil
 Big Jack

Phil Kelly
 Man at Grotto

Paul Devlin
 Jack Devlin

Kahn Devlin
 Children at Door

Jean Costello
 Woman with Sick Child

George Shane
 Cardinal's Secretary

Garrett Keogh
 Religious Inspector

Paddy Scully
 Kenneth Graham

Sean Rafferty
 Father Sheridan

John Keegan
 Father Donnelly

Pat Leavy
 Woman at Grotto

Devo Caroy
 Gerry Sullivan

Gerry Sullivan
 Medical Attendants

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English, County Tyrone, 1954. 10-year-old Barry O'Neill, along with some other altar boys, is taken ▶



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Stanley Baker's 'Zulu'

From Les Dicks

I have seldom read a more spurious defence of a film's critics than Geoffrey Bland's misreading of Stanley Baker's role in *Zulu* (BBC March). It is Bland's highly personal and idiosyncratic view, not readily identified as such and certainly not supported by the facts in his own description, would send opinion-readers to believe that Baker's role in *Zulu* is "dramatic" in the classical sense of, say, Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* or Verdi's *La Traviata*. In fact, Bland's actions throughout are entirely consistent with the traditions of critics (and military historians and of no other composer) who view the viewer's sympathy as their only role in any "dramatic" work. In *Zulu* they act in the most damning way: in Bland's whitewashed version of the charge of the light brigade at Catter's last stand - not to be set against an entirely rational comparison to a character who does in fact lose his marbles (Jack Hawkins) going mad. If Baker is the face of stereotypical odds against an inferior and human degree of fear and apprehension, it is simply wrong to characterize him as "consciously of first" and then as "almost bullying" when he assumes the mantle of command and issues necessary orders in his role - the defence of their precarious position.

Bland's interpretive skills are at their shallowest, however, when proceeding to note Baker's "discovery" at playing somebody from the "officer class" far from being the critical insight Macaulay's version implies. His "discovery" is in fact an aspect of the part maker is being asked upon to play - an officer of engineers who certainly does not give the impression "that he engineered the entire conflict" (as he could win his battle upon) but on the contrary emphasizes his doubts for each step (perry-clapping: "I told you, I came up here to build a bridge") his work/lifeless lip-licks, no matter the severity of his rank, are made all the more startling through the dramatic presence of his costume and truly specific manner who is indeed a member of the depicted culture that is treated as a constant irony by Michael Caine, an aristocrat far from Baker's identity but nothing but contempt - still the best actor to respect our member to be true of his role.

It is this crucial relationship that Macaulay seems so woefully blind as, bringing us comparison of Welsh music starts to be concluded by stating that "Zulu" has indeed shown an emotional vulnerability which Baker and Barton might have forecast upon. Might have - but didn't. As they stand surveying the carnage at the end of *Zulu*, Caine, who had never experienced combat before, admits to being sick and exhausted and asks Baker if he felt the same way his first time Baker responds, in a beautifully measured line every bit as "placid" and "gentle" as any Englishman has delivered. "I've done it you think I stand over this battle's first night than once?"

Just say no thank you once overheard

defending a fictional film character from Bland's attacks, it should be noted that Lt. John Chard was a historical figure who was awarded, in recognition of his actions in the battle depicted in *Zulu*, a Victoria Cross "for valor and extreme courage beyond that normally expected of the British soldier in face of the enemy", as we're told in the closing narration - spoken masterfully by Richard Briers.

Joey J. Hill, California

A violent part

From New Head

David Gauntlett (last April) takes David Bates to task for, among other things, the findings of academic research into the possible effects of screen violence. While Bates may have overstated his case, and while the proposed intervention in the Central Area and Public Order Bill seems sensible, Gauntlett's dismissive attitude to research that suggests a link between violent films and actual behaviour is disappointing.

If Gauntlett has spent so long studying existing research, he must know that not all laboratory experiments were as crude as those of Bandura's studies with children and dolls to which he refers. Of course levels of violence within our society cannot be attributed to violence on our screens, but this is not the same as saying that violent videos cannot have any influence on our behaviour. Gauntlett simplifies a very complex area and his letter begs a number of questions - first, how can we credibly claim a link between screen violence and real-life behaviour not yet proven, and second, where does this apparent predisposition to violence come from?

We know that a number of factors are often associated with the development of an individual's violent behaviour. These are generally accepted as being played their part in influencing that behaviour - for example, lack of maternal affection in early life, being abused and beaten as a child, having parents who tolerate displays of aggression. Doing it in a violent environment. But these are associations, not proven causes and effects. It does not therefore seem so far fetched that regular viewing of videos which depict cruelly violent behaviour as someone may also play a part in desensitising us to violence and even in encouraging or encouraging violent behaviour.

Violence has been a feature of human social activity for as long as we know. Probably it always will be. But levels of violence and tolerance of it differ from one culture to another. The output of violence as a form of entertainment within our video culture is itself an indication of our individual attitudes towards it. In the early days, such films are likely to help perpetuate and reinforce a prevailing attitude of violence as an everyday part of social interaction.

There are many researchers who feel they have identified a link between viewing violence on screen and violent behaviour. They may not be objective proof of a causal link, but unless every viewer of violent films committed a violent act, thereby affecting society - a most unlikely scenario - we must conclude that it is likely to be shown attempts to prove cause and effect will have researchers in greater danger than they - the

very question is a red herring. UNICEF are not disagreeing a link. Film-makers and all those associated with the film industry need to view these issues a little more seriously.

Wong Mui, The National Association for Child and Family Mental Health

Child's play

From Radio Times (April 13) and Andrew Fraser (April 13)

We would like to disagree with what you wrote about *Children's Play* (2nd (BBC April). Every child we know who has seen it has enjoyed it and we thought it was excellent.

You said "Children's Play did not do the job and spontaneity of a non-playing". This may seem true in an adult but not in the children that the film is named for. We are disappointed that you would advise adults to "review" a children's film. We would enjoy reading your reviews of films, but not if you review children's films from an adult point of view. Maybe you should get children to do some of your reviews.

Glewyn

Misattribution

From Alexander Walker, Film Critic

Evening Standard

May I draw your attention to the mistaken identification of the hosting Stanley's film critic (BBC March, p. 63), and ask you to make sure it is corrected, and not repeated? James W.

Pinker film

From Neil Morley

I was wondering to learn about the background to the filming of Harold Pinter's *The Hearting* in Anne Egerton's celebration of Peter Hall's film (26th April). I don't have a copy of the video, but I do have the American film. My own criticisms of this production, also released in 1973.

The film was made at Shepperton Studios. So far as I know, it was never released in Britain, but I did catch it when it surfaced on television here in 1982. I'd noticed that *The Hearting* is the finest British play since the war, but I must say that I was disappointed by the film version. John Berry's cinematic language was still rigorous to some extent as a very young actor, but the film lost the stage version's focus of an off-beat social play. The film's inevitable reliance on intimate close-up shots is of its own kind a group conversation and, sadly, more than a brilliant dialogue seemed curiously measured, though well explained by Pinter.

We should be grateful that some sort of film record did exist of this outstanding play, if only in such high-quality private video collection. And the fact that it has it so much is heartening proof that you don't have to have won the stage contest to experience its impact.

London (201)

Additions and corrections

Book 2004, p. 48 (Additions) "Spartan's opera is *India*" should read "Gardner's *André Chénier*".

April 1994, p. 58 The Ouch Nick Snow should read Gary Snow.

p. 66 Correction. The highly ironic was intended to refer to the *Highly* Guide for the Churches.

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